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Doctoral thesis

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
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## ABSTRACT

Peter Eisenman is one of the leading architects and architectural theorists of the second half of the 20th century. This dissertation seeks to analyze his assumptions about the ontology of architectural works, that are unavoidable in any architectural theory. By "ontology" I here understand the problems what pertain to the understanding of the existence of architecture works: are they for instance assumed to be physical buildings, or contents of mental ideas or immaterial Platonic Forms. Similar questions can be asked about the meanings attributed to architectural works. Eisenman assumes that architecture is about ideas, and this raises the question of how he conceives the nature of these ideas and how we as human beings recognize or interpret them. In this dissertation, I discuss and analyze the necessary assumptions of his theoretical views as they developed through his career. Since fundamental questions in architecture often have wider philosophical implications, I am considering Eisenman's theories in a philosophical as well as in a historical and sometimes biographical context. The aim is not necessarily to read Eisenman in the context of philosophical works and philosophers that he cites, but to analyze the philosophical assumptions that need to be made in order to sustain the positions that he takes, even though he does not necessarily discuss them. This means that when Eisenman makes claims about architecture, he must have underlying ontological assumptions for his claims to be tenable. These assumptions are often not obvious and need to be made so.

The dissertation consists of four chapters. The first chapter is concerned with the ontology of architecture and Eisenman's general conceptions of architectural works. This pertains to questions his conception of architectural works: are they physical objects, mental ideas, or abstract immaterial entities. The discussion makes it apparent that meaning is a central problem for Eisenman, and this provides the framework for the next two chapters. The second chapter thus has Eisenman's understanding of meaning as its central theme, and it contains Eisenman's general discussions of meaning and signification in architecture. In the third chapter, I present and discuss Eisenman's own projects. Specifically, I discuss how Eisenman infuses his own projects with meaning or claims to do so, and how they have developed throughout his career. As mentioned, the three chapters have an obvious line of enquiry from the general ontological problem to the specific application of theory in the design process. What this chapter makes evident is that Eisenman has created a certain system in which meanings play the central role, while at the same time, these meanings are unstable

and open to continuous change. This instability then introduces the question about the force that underwrites this continuous change.

In the final chapter I analyze Eisenman's position in relation to the avant-garde and the development of an architecture culture in America. The chapter provides an overarching discussion of the concept of the avant-garde as well as present the institutional theory of art, which further sheds important light on Eisenman's views. The chapter shows that Eisenman relies on the assumption that the avant-garde has the defining capacities when it comes to architectural meanings, and the chapter identifies it as the force that underwrites the instability and the constant change of these meanings. The concept of the avant-garde thus enables us to understand both how Eisenman positioned himself in the architecture culture, and how and why he continuously changed his position. The avant-garde in Eisenman's theorizing is thus not merely a social phenomenon but constitutes a crucial force that underwrites his assumptions concerning the ontology of architectural works and their meanings.

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Oslo, June 2023

Amund Mikalsen Rolfsen

**CONTENTS**

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

# INTRODUCTION

The significant increase of interest in architectural theory during the 1960s and 1970s coincided with, or followed a growing critique of, modernist functionalism. In the decades following the second world war, the dire need for buildings provided perfect conditions for the functionalist style, which eventually came to dominate the built environment. The need for fast reconstruction of European cities and for providing sufficient housing for the growing American middle class was unquestionable. However, the utilitarian, structural and societal justifications of architecture which composed the theoretical foundation of modernist functionalism seemed increasingly doubtful three decades after the second world war. The belief in the emancipatory and revolutionary goals suggested by the manifestos of the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s was already questioned in architectural writings after 1945. This shift was influenced by the tragic experience of the war,[1] and by the 1960s, the acknowledgment of the faults of modernist architecture was an acknowledgment of the faults of the underlying justificatory arguments as well. The claim was that something had been lost on the way, and that one was left with only a *style or* a certain "functionalist" aesthetic.

In this context Peter Eisenman positioned his work as both a critique and a development of modernism, but he was not the first who searched for an alternative to modernist functionalism. In 1954 Philip Johnson, who 22 years prior had mounted the exhibition on the *International Style* at the Museum of Modern art in New York, posed an attack on the "seven crutches" of architecture.[2] Among the crutches were usefulness, comfort, economy or cheapness, and structure, and for Johnson they did not by themselves encompass all the creative possibilities within architecture. For him, the crutches simply did not provide architecture with sufficient criteria for success. Johnson was influenced by Geoffrey Scott's *Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste*, which in short was a critique of the need for architecture to just express its ethical, mechanical, biological, or romantic

[1] Joan Ockman notes this in the introduction to her anthology of writings from 1945-1968. See Joan Ockman and Edward Eigen, *Architecture culture 1943-1968 : a documentary anthology*, Columbia books of architecture, (New York: Rizzoli, 1993). 13

[2] Philip Johnson, "The Seven Crutches of Modern Architecture," *Perspecta* 3 (1955), http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566834. Accessed 05.01.2022.

underpinnings.[3] What Scott pointed out in 1914 and Johnson suggested in 1955 was that there was and is no easy way to establish principles for good design. This meant that the solution to a functional problem or a structural requirement did not necessarily lead to good architecture. Accordingly, when the flaws of modernist architecture became apparent, there was a search for what was lost, which in turn provided new ways of defining the architectural object. Eisenman positioned himself within this search and attempted to explore the theoretical possibilities of an architecture emancipated from the constraints of modernist functionalism. This search has lasted from the 1960s up to the present day, which makes Eisenman's work a telling example of the development of architectural theory and the problems it faced in the second half of the 20th century.

Kate Nesbitt noted that the apparent limitations of modernism precipitated a multiplicity of architecture theories that addressed the *crisis of meaning* in the discipline.[4] The loss of a supposedly unified position in architecture did provide an open space for new speculations of what architecture ought to be. With his own architectural practice combined with theoretical writings and reflections, Eisenman was questioning the relationship between architecture and the outside world as well as architecture's own tradition. In general, this means Eisenman's project can be characterized as being more concerned with criticizing what architecture ought to be, or ought to do, rather than providing prescriptions. Jeffrey Kipnis, a collaborator and long-term ally, has described Eisenman's work as a "struggle against the humanist tradition,"[5] which for Kipnis means that it has been a continuous "conceptual critique of bourgeoise architectural conventions."[6] The use of the word bourgeoise in this instance does not indicate that Eisenman's project had a Marxist foundation and favored the architectural conventions of the working class. Kipnis' comment merely suggests that Eisenman's theoretical project was one of negation and of constant questioning of the status quo. However, within this questioning there was a search for something new. This skepticism did not mean that Eisenman wanted to replace the functionalist authority with another one, but rather that he was questioning the possibility of an authority in an absolute sense. This raises

[3] Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (Boston Houghton Mifflin, 1914). The influence of Scott on Johnson is also described in: Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A history of architectural theory : from Vitruvius to the present*, Geschichte der Architekturtheorie, (London: Zwemmer, 1994). 343

[4] See the introduction in: Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a new agenda for architecture : an anthology of architectural theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). 18

[5] Mathew Ford, Jeffrey Kipnis, and Peter Eisenman, *By other means : notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman*, vol. notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman (Leiden: GAA Foundation, 2016). 10

[6] Ibid.

the interconnected question of what was motivating Eisenman's architecture and what was motivating Eisenman. Central to this question is his assumptions on the existence of an architectural work, or its ontology.

Eisenman has described his interest in architecture as idealist by saying that it "had nothing to do with the reality of building."[7] For him, architecture was intellectual and concerned ideas, and the buildings and drawings of buildings he produced suggest that they were conceived of as containers of architectural ideas, rather than fulfilling a specific requirement or solving a pressing need. With the continuous critique of conventions or any other theoretical underpinnings of architecture, Eisenman has been creating a theoretical labyrinth where the goal was not to find a way out. This means that there is no immediately comprehensible and complete theoretical system, but rather a complex and sprawling set of ideas. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to investigate and discuss this labyrinth of ideas and speculations, and the final intention is to contribute to making sense of Eisenman's overall project, both philosophically and historically.

In any theory of architecture assumptions about the nature of existence of architectural works are unavoidable. Peter Eisenman's work is no exception, and the question that motivates the discussion in this dissertation is his assumptions about the ontology of architectural works. The problem of ontology pertains to dilemmas and theoretical problems of the existence of works of architecture, or works of art. Are architectural works physical buildings or ideas that pre-exist these buildings. Are these works created or discovered? Are these works unique and individual, or could they be replicated? Do they have an existence as extramental physical objects? Are they mental ideas existing in the mind of the architect, or are they Platonic abstract entities? Are these works reducible to their physical shape? Do these shapes exist independently of the material in which they are realized and of the minds of the architects who conceive them, or are they mere social constructs?

The conception of an architectural work and argumentation about its nature have massive consequences for architectural design and form-making. So, identifying Eisenman's fundamental assumptions about the existence of architectural works clarifies what he thinks an architect should do. In this sense, the making of architecture is different if one conceives a work of architecture solely as a mental idea, rather than define it purely as a physical structure or an immaterial Platonic entity. The problem goes straight into the age-old discussion of

[7] Thomas Weaver and Peter Eisenman, "Peter Eisenman in conversation with Thomas Weaver," *AA Files*, no. 74 (2017), http://www.jstor.org/stable/44252553. 153

what the relationship between form and content is. For Eisenman, this relationship is especially important, and his criticism of how certain forms attain meaning raises the question of how he defines these meanings.

Looking at architectural implications of Eisenman's theorizing, this dissertation seeks to address Eisenman's justifications of formal-spatial decisions in architectural design. As we shall see, these underlying assumptions are not necessarily easy to identify. Since Eisenman is an architect, and not a philosopher his treatment of these assumptions is not rigorous, systematic, or explicit. As such, a significant part of the current study involved attempting to make sense of Eisenman's sprawling theories and reconstruct his underlying assumptions, and to determine if it is possible to discern any fundamental position.

**Peter Eisenman**

Before going deeper into the contents and main approach of this dissertation, it is necessary to summarize Eisenman's career to provide a sense of the historical and cultural context that he has been operating within. Peter Eisenman was born August 11. 1932 in Newark, New Jersey. Both his parents were from secularized Jewish families. His mother came from an upper middle-class family, and his father, a chemist, was from a slightly less affluent family of chicken farmers. Eisenman's suburban childhood in New Jersey was marked by an interest in sports, and after a brief swimming career in college, he studied architecture as an undergraduate at Cornell University before volunteering in the Korean War.

After his service in the war, Eisenman spent some time travelling around Asia, seeing among other things, Angkor Wat, Chandigarh, Nam Penh and Katsura's Imperial villa in Kyoto. On return to the US, he worked as an architect for Percival Goodman and later for Walter Gropius, who disappointed Eisenman since his office at this point just did "crass commercial stuff."[8] He eventually took a Master of Architecture at Columbia University in New York and went to Cambridge University to do a PhD in architecture, which he finished in 1963. It was James Stirling who convinced Eisenman to go to England with the phrase: "Peter, you are clearly a good designer, but you know absolutely nothing about architecture."[9] At Cambridge, Eisenman met Colin Rowe, who became his mentor, travelling companion and de facto supervisor, even if the dissertation was officially supervised by Leslie Martin.

[8] Eisenman's comment on Gropius cited in the interview: Weaver and Eisenman, "Peter Eisenman in conversation with Thomas Weaver." 154
[9] Ibid. 157

In his dissertation, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, Eisenman developed a method for analyzing the formal workings of modernist architecture, which eventually was employed in the design of a series of houses labelled "Cardboard Architecture." These Houses were designed and constructed in the late 1960s and early 1970s and worked as a didactic experimentation in which primacy was given to the architectural ideas. The works of Guiseppe Terragni and Le Corubsier, which were analyzed in his dissertation, acted as natural predecessors for Eisenman in these projects and contributed to the formal associations between his work and the early modernist movements of the 1920s and 1930s.

After completing his PhD-thesis, Eisenman returned to the United States where he eventually taught at Princeton University and did projects with Michael Graves. There they established CASE, the Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment. Kenneth Frampton, Richard Meier, John Hejduk, Stanford Anderson, and Colin Rowe were all affiliated with the group, who arranged seminars and meetings at east coast universities, establishing a platform for the debate and discussion of architecture. In 1967 Princeton tenured Michael Graves, but denied Eisenman the same tenure, so he moved to New York and founded the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS). This was partly funded by the Museum of Modern Art and Philip Johnson was one of the main supporters. The institute was a hybrid institution, "halfway between school and office," where both education, architectural projects, exhibitions, publishing, research and the organization of parties and events were part of the general activities.[10] Several of the people involved with CASE continued to contribute to the activities at the IAUS, and they invited, among others, Bernard Tschumi, Aldo Rossi, and Vittorio Gregotti to teach, lecture and published their texts, thus creating a connection between European and American architecture. Seminal to the activity of the Institute was the publication of the *Oppositions* magazine, which contained many of the ideas and theories proposed by its protagonists. Joan Ockman has described the magazine as deliberately avant-garde with its critical attitude, where conventions were opposed and a new approach to architecture was suggested.[11] With the activities at the IAUS and *Oppositions*

[10] This is clear by the announcement from the institute in 1967, CCA Archive, and also reprinted in Ford, Kipnis, and Eisenman, *By other means : notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman*, notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman. 107. See also the work by Kim Förster who has conducted a major historical investigation on the institute. Kim Förster, "The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York (1967-1985). Ein kulturelles Project in der Architektur." (PhD ETH 2011). And Suzanne Frank, *IAUS: An Insider's Memoir* (New York: Self published, 2010). is also a good documentation of the activity at the Institute.

[11] Joan Ockman, "Resurrecting the Avant-Garde: The History and Program of Oppositions," in *Architecturereproduction*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).

Eisenman sought to provide a reconstruction of the discipline of architecture, whereby the introduction of new ideologies for a new kind of architecture was the motivation. During this time, Eisenman participated in exhibitions and events in Europe as well as in the United States.

One of the most notable of these exhibitions was on display at MoMA in 1969 and contained the works of five architects: Eisenman, John Hejduk, Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey and Michael Graves. After the publication of their works in 1972, they received attention when architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote an article in the New York times, calling them the "The New York Five." This initiated a debate between "Whites and the Greys," which was characterized by Robert Stern, in an article in Architectural forum titled "Five on Five," as a battle between the white "post-functionalists" concerned with formalism and architectural autonomy, and the grey "post-modernists," who were concerned with tradition and historical influence.[12] However, this opposition was not necessarily as firm as proposed by Stern at the time, and it has been suggested that it was a part of the creation of an intellectual architecture culture with fierce ideological debates.[13] The fight between the "white" New York Five and the "greys" with Stern, Jaqueline Robertson, Charles Moore, Romaldo Giurgola and Allan Greenberg could thus be seen to be part of an overall discussion of architecture, where an antidote to modernist functionalism was sought in many places with many angles, and the aim was to create a new public image of the culture of architecture which would benefit all. Eisenman enjoyed the opposition and was described by Robert Stern as the "principal theorist" of the whites.[14] This is one of the reasons why his position is especially interesting in analyzing the development of architecture in this period.

With the founding of and work in the IAUS and CASE, and by creating buildings, publications and exhibitions, Peter Eisenman established himself as someone with a huge network of allies and affiliations in American architecture as well as in East Coast intelligentsia in general. He also established himself stylistically as a recognizable character, with handmade shirts with detachable collars, suspenders, a bowtie, and round glasses. So,

[12] Robert A. M. Stern, "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or, Up and Down from Orthodoxy," in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1976). 242. Originally published in L'Architecture d'Aujourd hui 186.

[13] See, for instance, Joan Ockman, "Venice and New York," *Casabella* no. 619-620 (1995).: "while it purportedly described two opposed positions with respect to pop culture, history, American versus European architecture, etc at a specific moment…it also served to package or 'brand' the two camps stylistically."

[14] Stern, "Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or, Up and Down from Orthodoxy."242

even if he was denied tenure at Princeton in 1967, by the 1980s Eisenman had manage to establish himself as a "major player" in the field of architecture.[15]

Eisenman ended his position as director of the IAUS in 1982 to focus on his architectural office, which he operated together with Jaquelin Robertson. Accordingly, this focus marked an increase in both the overall production of buildings and in the size and complexity of each building. In addition, it was an expansion to other parts of the world, and Eisenman completed projects in Japan, Germany, Italy, France as well as in the United States. He still contributed to the theoretical debate and produced essays and texts, which worked as a theoretical background and explanation of the design method employed in his increased production of buildings.

The influence of and later collaboration with Jacques Derrida coincided with the development of a *Deconstructivist* architecture, (a term which Eisenman despised)[16] which culminated in an exhibition curated by Mark Wigley and Philip Johnson at MoMA in 1988. At this point the architecture of deconstruction had become a style, which was recognized by its disjunctions, warped spaces, tilted planes and zigzagging lines and diagonals, influenced heavily by early Russian constructivism. As such, Wigley and Johnson could easily connect the works of Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Coop Himmelblau, and Daniel Libeskind, who was not explicitly influenced by Derrida, with Bernhard Tschumi and Eisenman, who seriously tried to incorporate deconstructivist thought.[17] This showed the tendency of architecture to be formal and thus to classify architectural works visually, even if the main protagonists of the discourse were trying to propose another goal or basis. However, Eisenman was always interested in the intellectual aspects of architecture and has continued to pursue new theoretical insight to shed light on how architecture gains meaning and how this process works. Following years of Jungian psychoanalysis and Karl Jung's ideas of human archetypes, he has characterized himself as a "thinking type" as opposed to a feeling type,.[18]

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[15] The label "major player" is used by Jaquelin Robertson to characterize the participants at a conference held in Charlottesville, virginia. Cited in Va School of Architecture University of Virginia Charlottesville, *The Charlottesville tapes : transcript of the conference at the University of Virginia School of Architecture, Charlottesville, Virginia November 12 and 13, 1982* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

[16] Eisenman said in an interview that "I'm very much against deconstructivism, I think it's a sham, I mean, it doesn't exist." In: Tom Ravenscroft, "Deconstructivism "killed off postmodernism" says Peter Eisenman" *Dezeen,* 10. May 2022 https://www.dezeen.com/2022/05/10/deconstructivism-killed-off-postmodernism-says-peter-eisenman/

[17] Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988).

[18] See the conversation on the opposition between Eisenman and Christopher Alexander in: Matthew Allen and Nicolas Kemper, "Oozing Feeling, Peter Eisenman," *New York Review of Architecture,* no. 29 (2022). Here Eisenman says: "I went through twenty years of Jungian analysis, and Karl Jung has this idea that there are

Eisenman was thus devoted to thinking about architecture and creating and finding new ways to discuss architectural ideas.

In the 1990s, Eisenman contributed to the development of a digital architecture made possible by new technological and digital tools. By employing Greg Lynn and Ingeborg Rocker, pioneers of early digital architecture, Eisenman showed his desire to follow trends in the development of architecture, especially at a theoretical level. This also meant that there was a transition from Derrida to Gilles Deleuze as the philosophical backdrop. Even though Eisenman's affiliation with Deleuze was brief, he was jointly responsible with Greg Lynn for introducing *The Fold* as a theoretical concept which in turn got translated into architecture and given a spatial definition.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s Eisenman's production of buildings continued, and the completion of the Memorial of the Murdered Jews in Berlin in 2005 and the building of The City of Culture at Santiago de Compostela, which opened its first buildings in 2010, are the most published and well-known projects. Throughout his career, Eisenman has taught at Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, The Cooper Union and Ohio State University, and is still teaching at Yale School of Architecture. The participation in the culture of architecture for more than 60 years, and his propensity to change position and remain relevant, has made Peter Eisenman an especially interesting case when it comes to understanding the development of architecture theory in the same period.

**Research Objective**

The main objective in this dissertation is to discuss what Eisenman has said, written and assumed about the ontology of architectural works, and consequently about the relationship between form and meaning in architecture. By ontology I understand problems that pertain to the nature of existence of architectural works and meanings attributed to them: are they mental contents, physical entities or did he understand them as immaterial Platonic forms? In his essay "The Architectural Work" the philosopher Roman Ingarden distinguished between a building and the architectural work. The former is just a "real" object with a physical existence, while the latter, even if it relies on a "real" object, also needs the creative act of an architect and the reconstructive acts of a viewer.[19] Ontologically, Ingarden assumed that an

archetypes in the human personality: thinking as the opposite of feeling, sensation as the opposite of intuition. I am a thinking type, and you can't change that."

[19] Roman Ingarden, "The architectural work," in *Ontology of the Work of Art,* translated by Raymond Meyer with John T. Goldthwait, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989.) *263*

architectural work could be both a physical object and a cultural and social object. A work of architecture from this point of view was thus neither just identical with the physical arrangement of materials in a certain shape, nor just a socially constructed object with a purely mental existence.

My aim in the dissertation is to interpret Eisenman's ontological views in a coherent and precise manner by studying the assumptions that he makes in his theoretical writings, even if a complete systematization of his theories is unattainable. When there are questions that are left unanswered, this needs to be pointed out, which means that the thesis is also an exploration of the incoherencies that stands in the way of a systematic understanding of his theories. Since fundamental questions in architecture often have wider philosophical implications, I am considering Eisenman's works in a philosophical as well as in a historical and sometimes biographical context. This means that when Eisenman makes claims about architecture, he must also necessarily make underlying assumptions for his claims to be tenable. These assumptions are often not obvious and need to be made so. For instance, when Eisenman defines architecture as concerned with ideas, this raises the question of how he defines the nature of these ideas and how we as human beings recognize or interpret them. Accordingly, the aim is to discuss the correlation between Eisenman's arguments and what kind of general assumptions he relies on in his writings. It is also necessary to consider assumptions among his peers and the current trends of the time. In his career, Eisenman has often avoided consistency, but this does not mean that one cannot discuss underlying philosophical assumptions, and this is my intention.

From this intention it follows that Eisenman's usage of certain of terms and how he constructs arguments is of special interest. This relies on the understanding of his philosophical as well as architectural sources and the context in which he was operating. The mode of argumentation and the positioning of architecture must therefore be understood in relation to the tradition that Eisenman was working in and often in opposition to. His influences from linguistics and French post-structuralist theory are especially interesting in this sense, and the question is if and how these influences can be translated into architecture.

Since Eisenman has showed a tendency to change his views during his career, it is interesting to see if there are assumptions or arguments that are consistent, but also to see what the motivation for these changes may be. This is not just about the connection between the internal characteristics of Eisenman's theoretical system with the external context. Rather, it pertains to the general assumptions and the definitions of architecture that enable the possibility of permanent change. Central in Eisenman's work is a self-conscious avant-garde

attitude, and consequently it became important to ask how or why the avant-garde attitude could be used to explain Eisenman's theories.

At the center of all these investigations is the question of meaning in architecture. As will become apparent, meaning is central in Eisenman's theoretical system, and he both rejected it and relied on it at different periods in his career. Meaning is a term that in a common use denotes what is intended by a word or a sentence. It could thus be defined to be the idea or concept that is conveyed by a word, or a proposition conveyed by a sentence. Transferred to objects, like architecture, this implies that architectural works too are thought to convey an idea or a concept. However, this is not straightforward and requires an explanation of what these meanings are and how their nature is conceived. An important question that arises in this regard is how meaning is established in architecture and if there is a difference between certain kinds of meaning. So, a substantial part of the dissertation will be a discussion of how Eisenman understands meaning, and consequently how he attributes meaning to his own as well as other works of architecture. As mentioned, this could help to shed light on the dilemmas about the justification of form in architecture after modernist functionalism.

**Methodological approach**

This is a dissertation in the intellectual history of architecture, or more precisely it is a thesis in the history of architectural theory. As the description of the research objective above has suggested, the dissertation is about the intellectual ideas on and about architecture and not necessarily about buildings themselves. This means that it is the verbally expressed, or written ideas that are of primary interest. However, since Eisenman has been relating architecture to ideas inherent to it, or associated architecture with ideas, it is often difficult to separate works of architecture from the ideas that motivate them. The questions that I am asking about the works of architecture are therefore always discussed in relation to Eisenman's own writings.

In the dissertation I follow a hermeneutic approach that takes intentionality as its starting point. In *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, Mark Bevir states that "historians of ideas study relics of the past in the hope of recovering their meaning."[20] For Bevir it is the study of hermeneutic meanings that is of importance for the historian, and these hermeneutic meanings are distinguished from both semantic meanings, understood in terms of truth conditions, and linguistic meanings, understood in terms of conventional usage. Hermeneutic meanings are

[20] Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) *27*

thus concrete and specific, they are concerned with the meanings of specific utterances. Consequently, to approach the hermeneutic meanings of utterances, one needs to consider an author's intention.[21] This cannot be reduced to either abstract linguistic conventions or the truth conditions existing in a semantic context. So, when I discuss what Eisenman writes and says about architecture, I aim at finding what Eisenman intended to say at the time when he was saying these things. This does not necessarily mean that it is possible to find or reconstruct a fully conscious strong intention in everything Eisenman has said or written, but it is possible to approach the subject with a *weak intentionalism* in mind. Bevir makes the distinction between strong and weak intentionalism as follows: "Whereas strong intentionalists regard intentions as conscious and prior to utterances, a weak intentionalism allows for the unconscious and for changes of intent during the act of making an utterance."[22] What I mean with my hermeneutic approach is therefore an understanding of intentionality as the reasonable reconstruction of an individual's intentions. Intentions are thus the contents of the mental activity of an individual, and even though meanings derive from intentions which is influenced by social context, they cannot be reduced to this context.

Furthermore, this conception of *weak intentionality* makes it possible to study the implications of Eisenman's views and discuss whether his views were consistent or contradictory. A strong intentionalist position would limit my discussions to documented explicit beliefs, and consistency or contradiction could not be implied, except when they were explicitly and consciously mentioned by Eisenman himself. At the same time, since the weak intentionalist position takes thoughts and ideas to be mental contents of an individual, it allows me to establish whether views are contradictory. This would not be possible if these views were thought to have an abstract, immaterial existence, or if they were postulated as Platonic entities, in which it would be difficult to see how views could be contradictory.

It is necessary to emphasize that this dissertation is about arguments, their implications and assumptions, and the correlation between arguments. By this I mean that my intention is to examine if there is a logical consistency between Eisenman's views and arguments and to analyze what they entail. The comparison between his writings on architecture in general and his specific explanations and descriptions of his own projects is especially interesting in this sense. This hermeneutic approach is based on the analysis of the necessary assumptions that Eisenman must rely on in his architectural theory. Problems of architectural theory are often variations of wider philosophical problems, and theoretical

[21] Ibid. *37*
[22] Ibid. *27*

positions in architectural theory cannot avoid being specific variations of wider philosophical positions. My aim is therefore to reconstruct the philosophical assumptions that Eisenman explicitly relied on or implicitly had to rely on in order to formulate the theoretical positions that he did. It is therefore Eisenman's writings that comprise the core of the material considered in this dissertation, especially since these texts reflects his intended position at the time they were written. This also means that Eisenman's retrospective view on his own work does not necessarily shed light on his previous position but says something about his position when he made retrospective comments. Since the dissertation mainly on the first half of Eisenman's career, his contemporary position is therefore of less importance.

Even if hermeneutic meaning is irreducible to social context or abstract linguistic conventions, I am considering the underlying social and cultural conditions enabling Eisenman's rise to prominence in the world of architecture. As mentioned, the basis for the dissertation is Eisenman's own thoughts, ideas, and arguments, but in order to make sense of them, it is necessary to consider Eisenman's contemporary architects as well as relevant and fashionable views in his context. It is important to notice that intellectual history is distinguished from the history of ideas and cultural history and that it is distinct from sociology as well. As intellectual historian Peter Gordon put it, in sociology or other theories of discourse "grand categories of human meaning such as "Truth", "Knowledge" and "Objectivity" turn out to be socially conditioned values." But "the historian's task is not to judge whether certain ideas are right or wrong, but instead to comprehend what counts as right or wrong in a particular historical and social setting."[23] Accordingly, my intention is not necessarily to say when Eisenman is right or wrong, but rather to understand why he makes the claims that he makes. So, when there are logical inconsistencies or faults in the arguments, the point is not just to refute, but to describe such situations when they occur and what might explain them. Here Eisenman's cultural context and the intellectual environment often provides a possible source of explanations. Since what matters is the intellectual content, and not the vehicles that transmitted it, it is possible to discuss similarities between Eisenman's views and the views of authors he did not explicitly cite. Even if he did not read these authors, these comparable views could circulate in the intellectual environment, and Eisenman could have heard these views without explicit mentioning of these authors.

[23] Peter Gordon, "What is Intellectual History: A frankly partisan introduction to a frequently misunderstood field," *The Harvard Colloqium*, no. March 2012 (2012).

Insofar as architecture is mostly defined as forms and shapes in space and not as words, the relationship between the written word and a physical building is not straightforward. I have therefore analyzed Eisenman's writings or talks, as well as his designs. I have also consulted the writings of the people who influenced him as well as his opponents, and authors who have written on Eisenman, either historically or theoretically, to get closer to an understanding of his theoretical system if it is possible to call it as such. This does of course require interpretation, and by comparing Eisenman's writings with others from the same period one could reach a better understanding of his often sprawling positions and get closer to what he intended to say.

**The position of this thesis in relation to the existing scholarship**

The architecture and design magazine *Dezeen* had a series of articles in spring 2022 on deconstructivist architecture, and one of these articles was dedicated to Peter Eisenman, in which he was called "the deconstructivist theorist."[24] The position as both an architect making buildings and an architectural theorist writing books and essays, has made Eisenman the subject of commentary, analysis, and critique, both in popular media[25] and in architectural publications.[26] This dissertation is about the philosophical underpinnings of architectural theory, and my attention will therefore be given to discussions of these underlying philosophical assumptions. Eisenman's serious attempts at translating philosophical ideas to architecture, most notably the use of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, have triggered a wealth of literature on his works. However, in most of these texts Eisenman's underlying philosophical assumptions are rarely discussed head on, either by himself or in the literature on him. As mentioned, this ambiguous tendency has been amplified by Eisenman's explicit unwillingness to be pinned down. Jörg Gleiter has called Peter Eisenman the "Icarus of post-avant-garde architecture," describing Eisenman's tendency to eliminate what one becomes. [27]

[24] Amy Frearson, "Peter Eisenman is the Deconstructivist Theorist," *Dezeen*, 4. May, 2022 https://www.dezeen.com/2022/05/04/peter-eisenman-deconstructivist-architect/

[25] See the articles by *The New York Times* architecture critics Paul Goldberger and Herbert Muschamp, for instance: Herbert Muschamp, "Architecture View; This Time Eisenman Goes Conventional," *The New York Times*, 2. May, 1993, https://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/02/arts/architecture-view-this-time-eisenman-goes-conventional.html, and Paul Goldberger, "Architecture's "5" Make Their Ideas Felt," *The New York Times,* 26. November, 1973, https://www.nytimes.com/1973/11/26/archives/architectures-5-make-their-ideas-felt-all-are-young-a-new-york.html, or the interviews of Eisenman in *The New York Magazine* and *Vanity Fair*.

[26] Most notably: *Assemblage, Architectural Design, Casabella, Perspecta, ANY, Log, Progressive Architecture, A+U, Oppositions* and *AA files,*

[27] Jörg Gleiter, "Peter Eisenman, Or How One Eliminates What One Becomes," *Serbian Architectural Journal* 6, no. 3 (2014): 228–37. 231,

Similarly, in his book *From Formalism to Weak Form,* Stefano Corbo stated that "his architecture has become a mysterious object, expressing a constant instability."[28] The literature devoted to Eisenman's whole career has been mainly concerned with how Eisenman questioned, disturbed and dislocated architecture. [29]

This does not mean that Eisenman's philosophical themes have been neglected. Since Eisenman has been influenced by philosophers, he invokes concepts and themes that philosophers find interesting, especially philosophers with the same interests as Eisenman. John Rajchman has described Gilles Deleuze's and Jacques Derrida's influence on Eisenman, and the use of concepts like "the fold," "absence," "trace," and "the other." [30] Similarly, Andrew Benjamin has written about Eisenman's work with an emphasis on his criticality.[31] However, neither Rajchman nor Benjamin have analyzed or discussed Eisenman's underlying philosophical assumptions, but rather used Eisenman's work to make their own claims. Their point was to show the reciprocal relationship of architecture and philosophy, where the given certainties in each field could be questioned, and to show that architecture was a critical activity, but not necessarily what made it critical.

The literature on Eisenman's use of linguistics and study of language also neglects these fundamental questions. Discussions on his definition of the syntactic and semantic in architecture, his use of Noam Chomsky's deep and surface structure, or Derrida's deconstruction, usually come down to questions on how architecture is treated like language.[32] Robin Evans has pointed to the problem of Eisenman's translation of language to architecture, claiming that Eisenman's architecture is not like language, but more like the

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[28] See Stefano Corbo, *From Formalism to Weak Form: The Architecture and Philosophy of Peter Eisenman* (Routledge Ltd, 2016). 123. A similar conclusion is found in Bernhard Kormoss, "Peter Eisenman: Theories and Practices" (PhD TU Eindhoven, 2007).

[29] As specific example is found in Michael Jasper's study of Eisenman's historical writing, which is characterized as constantly open. See Michael Jasper, "On Eisenman's Use of History," *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* 25, no. 1 (2013). 57

[30] John Rajchman, *Constructions*, (Cambridge Mass. Mit Press 1998) 17 John Racjhman, "Replications: On the Space and Time of Rebstockpark," in *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial, Eisenman Architects 1988-1998*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New York: Monacelli Press, 2004). 151

[31] Notably in: Andrew Benjamin, "Opening the Interstitial: Eisenman's Space of Difference," in *Blurred Zonse: Investigations of the Interstitial, Eisenman Architects 1988-1998*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New York: Monacelli Press, 2004, and Andrew Benjamin, *Philosophy and architecture*, vol. [2], Philosophy & architecture, (London: Academy Editions, 1990).

[32] See, Desley Luscombe, "Architectural Concepts in Peter Eisenman's Axonometric Drawings of House VI," *The Journal of Architecture* 19:4 (2014). Or Thomas Patin, "From Deep Structure to an Architecture in Suspense: Peter Eisenman, Structuralism, and Deconstruction," *Journal of architectural education (1984)* 47, no. 2 (1993), https://doi.org/10.2307/1425170.

study of language.[33] Again, this raises the question of what kind of underlying assumptions this study of language rested, and of which assumptions underwrite Eisenman's approach. This could in turn lead to answers to the questions on how Eisenman conceives architecture, and subsequently how he conceives form or meaning, questions which have not been explicitly asked in relation to Eisenman's understanding of architecture so far.

Architectural historians, architects and philosophers have been interested in Eisenman's ability to change, and how he has made a "critical" architecture.[34] His Deconstructivist project has even been called a "project of radical self-criticism."[35] My intention in this dissertation is to discuss the basis for this "radical self-criticism" and attempt to determine what underlying assumptions sustain this position. This is especially demanding since it is a study of a person who was quintessential in a period which was "marked by intense intellectual ambition as well as dense jargon."[36] This makes Eisenman's fundamental philosophical assumptions, especially the problem of ontology, difficult to isolate, which might be one of the reasons why this topic has not been explicitly discussed so far.

Since the starting point for the discussions in this dissertation is what Eisenman writes and says about architecture, it is natural that his own writings have the primary position in my bibliography. Eisenman's work consists of numerous essays and texts originally published in several different magazines, journals, and books, as well as explanations and descriptions of buildings, diagrams, drawings, and models. Moreover, he has written extensive analyses of architects from the past, most notably Guiseppe Terragni and Andrea Palladio, who each received monographs by Eisenman. However, Eisenman has been reluctant to write the book defining his views on architecture, like his contemporaries Robert Venturi with *Complexity and Contradiction* from 1966 or Aldo Rossi with *L'architettura della città*, also from 1966. His PhD-dissertation *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* from 1963 comes closest, but it has not prevented Eisenman from continuously altering his views according to his developing interests. This means that Eisenman's theoretical system, if there is such a thing, depends on an uneven oeuvre that is not easily synthesized. Nevertheless, there have been several attempts to compile Eisenman's work.

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[33] Robin Evans, "Not to be Used for Wrapping Purposes," *AA Files.* 10 (1985): 71

[34] This is also how Eisenman is discussed in: David Goldblatt, "The Dislocation of the Architectural Self", Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 49, no. 4, 1991, 337-348

[35] Sarah Deyong, "Deconstruction: the Project of Radical Self-criticism," in *A Critical History of Contemporary Architecture 1960-2010*, ed. Elie G. Haddad and David Rifkind (London: Routledge, 2014).

[36] Joan Ockman, "Consequences of Pragmatism: A Retrospect on "the Pragmatist Imagination." In *The Figure of Knowledge: Conditioning Architectural Theory, 1960s-1990s* ed. Sebastian Loosen, Rajesh Heynickx and Hilde Heynen, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020)

Two notable collections of essays, *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, and *Written into the Void: Selected Writings 1990-2004*, comprise some of the most important writings of his career, but they are not thought of as definite monographs. In addition, there are collections of projects and writings covering different periods in Eisenman's career which together form an overall picture of his development. For instance: *Houses of Cards* (1978), *Re:Working Eisenman (1993), Cities of Artificial Excavation: The Work of Peter Eisenman 1978-1988* (1994), *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial, Eisenman Architects 1988-1998* (2003), *Tracing Eisenman* (2006) and monographical publications from the journals *El Croquis* (1989) and (1997) and *Architecture and Urbanism* (1988). In addition, there are several publications on singular projects and contributions to compilations of works by several other architects.

His essays "Post-functionalism" originally published in 1976, and "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End" from 1985 are included in both Kate Nesbitt's collection *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, in Neil Leach's *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* and in K Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968*. Thus, it is evident that Eisenman has contributed to the canon of architecture theory in the late 20th century. In addition to Eisenman's writings and projects, I have consulted several talks, debates, and interviews which have been transcribed and published, as well as recordings of lectures and debates. These sources are supplementary in the corpus but are still important in order to construct a thorough understanding of the Eisenman's theoretical system.

Since Eisenman has been and still is a major figure in the world of architecture, his works have been thoroughly discussed, mostly in essays and articles. Architects and architectural historians like Manfredo Tafuri, Mario Gandelsonas, K Michael Hays, Anthony Vidler, Robin Evans, Colin Rowe in addition to other intellectuals like Rosalind Krauss, Frederic Jameson and Jacques Derrida have either contributed essays in publications on Eisenman's work or written important assessments of his projects.

Among the most notable works on Eisenman's entire career is Stefano Corbo's *From Formalism to Weak Form* (2014), which is a chronological presentation of Eisenman's changing theoretical positions. Bernhard Kormoss' PhD-thesis, *Peter Eisenman: Theories and Practices* (2007) follows the same organization. Moreover, the personal and biographical book *By Other Means* (2016), edited by Matt Roman with an essay by Jeffrey Kipnis, who tries to explain how and why Eisenman became the important figure he is, provides background information on his childhood and early years. Kim Förster's institutional studies

on the IAUS are also important for the understanding of the architecture culture in New York during the 1970s and early 1980s. In addition, entire chapters are devoted to Eisenman in Sean Keller's *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form after Modernism* (2017) K Michael Hays, *Architecture's Desire: Reading the Late Avant Garde* (2009), and Gevork Hartoonian's *Architecture and Spectacle: A Critique* (2016).

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, I have also considered works by the authors that Eisenman cited. Most notably, Colin Rowe, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Moreover, the writings of Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, Christian Norberg-Schulz and Christopher Alexander, all contribute to a contextualization of Eisenman's theories, and in order to explain the problems that Eisenman was struggling with it is necessary to consider a wider pool of philosophical positions, and especially philosophers like Gottlob Frege, Karl Popper, and Richard Rorty. Most of the philosophical sources of Eisenman's thinking have come from continental philosophy, but even if Eisenman did not use Frege, Popper or Rorty explicitly, their ideas would have been widely known by the time he was writing. These philosophers provide useful formulations of the philosophical problems and conceptual frameworks that are relevant for the questions I ask.

**Contents and Structure**

The thesis consists of four interconnected chapters each of which has a certain theme and angle. Even if the chapters mostly have an internal chronological organization, they are defined by the questions they address. The line of development through the chapters spans from the more philosophically overarching and general to the concrete and specific. This means that the first two chapters deal with Eisenman's often changing theoretical positions in general, while the final chapter provides a possible explanation for his continuous change and the motivation for this process. The search for an answer to the overarching philosophical questions thus work to uncover what Eisenman's theoretical system it could be about and how it can be understood.

The first chapter is concerned with the ontology of architecture and Eisenman's general conceptions of architectural works. This pertains to questions regarding the distinction between immaterial and material objects. The discussion makes it apparent that meaning is a central problem for Eisenman, and this provides the framework for the next two chapters. This does not mean that ontology, or the discussion about his assumptions about the nature of the existence of architecture, are abandoned after the first chapter, but the discussion becomes

more specific. So, when "meaning" emerges as a core theme in architectural deconstruction in the second chapter, it is to illustrate that it is crucial for understanding how Eisenman conceives of architecture in the sense of the ontology of architectural works, before going deeper into the specifics of how Eisenman uses what he calls meaning in both his writings and in the design of his projects.

The second chapter thus takes Eisenman's understanding of meaning as its central theme, and it contains Eisenman's general discussions of meaning and signification in architecture. The questions on what meaning is and how it is attributed to works of architecture by both Eisenman and his contemporaries are of special interest here. At the core of this discussion is the distinction that Eisenman makes between meaning and architectural meaning, and my aim is to clarify what is meant by this distinction. The presentation and discussion of the nature of meaning in its turn connects back to the discussion of ontology in the previous chapter.

In the third chapter, I present and discuss Eisenman's own projects and especially how he applies or fails to apply his general theories of meaning and its displacement. In this chapter I discuss how Eisenman infuses his own projects with meaning or claims to do so, and how they have developed throughout his career. As mentioned, the three chapters have an obvious line of enquiry from the general ontological problem to the specific application of theory in the design process. What this chapter makes evident is that Eisenman has created a certain system in which meanings play the central role, while at the same time, these meanings are unstable and open to continuous change. This instability then introduces the question about the force that underwrites this continuous change.

In the final chapter I analyze Eisenman's position in relation to the avant-garde and the development of an architecture culture in America. The chapter provides an overarching discussion of the concept of the avant-garde as well as present the institutional theory of art, which further sheds important light on Eisenman's views. The chapter shows that Eisenman relies on the assumption that the avant-garde has the defining capacities when it comes to architectural meanings, and the chapter identifies it as the force that underwrites the instability and the constant change of these meanings. The concept of the avant-garde thus enables us to understand both how Eisenman positioned himself in the architecture culture, and how and why he continuously changed his position. The avant-garde in Eisenman's theorizing is thus not merely a social phenomenon but constitutes a crucial force that underwrites his assumptions concerning the ontology of architectural works and their meanings.

A pressing question that needs to be answered is why Peter Eisenman? Why go deep into the theories of one of the most published, commented, and influential figures in architecture? His influence and standing in the world of architecture is precisely why Eisenman is so interesting. The thesis is thus an attempt to discuss the consequences of Eisenman's theories, both historically as well as philosophically. The intention is to systematically discuss his theories and their implications to say something about the general development of architecture, and especially the writings about architecture, from the 1960s and up to today. This could help us understand what kind of problems the discipline of architecture is facing, especially the problems that comes from within the discipline.

## Chapter 1

## ARCHITECTURAL WORKS AND PROBLEMS OF THEIR ONTOLOGY

### 1.1 Architecture as ideas

In 1961 Peter Eisenman went to Italy with Colin Rowe. In front of Palladio's Villa Pisani in Montagnana, Rowe asked Eisenman to tell him something about the façade which could not be seen.[1] Even if Eisenman did not have any satisfactory answer at the time, this event stands out as a crucial moment for his theoretical development during the next sixty years.[2] It rests on the widespread assumption that architecture is more than, or different from, what can be seen.[3] The problem of the "could-not-be-seen" in Palladio's façade was for Eisenman one of many examples of the fundamental basis of architecture, and Eisenman's search for this basis has made him, as Jeff Kipnis has described, the "proselytizer of depth."[4] This depth in architecture is for Eisenman, as he himself stated, that which constitutes the sense of "architecture's own being," and consequently the questioning of this being.[5] The result of this search for depth was two crucial ambitions: first, the search for the autonomy of architecture and second, the critical ambition that follows this search. Both were dependent on questions pertaining to the ontology of a work of architecture.[6] In this chapter I intend to discuss the initial assumptions about the nature of the existence of an architectural work which one must make in order to construct a valid argument for the decisions made in architectural design.

An architectural theorist can hardly avoid the question of the ontological status of an architectural object. The question is fundamental for the foundation of the discipline in general and has its basis in a traditional philosophical theme. It pertains to the dilemma of

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[1] See for instance: Thomas Weaver, "In Conversation with Peter Eisenman," *AA Files* 74 (2018). 158 or *Peter Eisenman: 13 Ways of Thinking About Heteronomy Part 13* (2019), and in Peter. Harrison Eisenman, Ariane Lourie, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008). 17

[2] Peter Eisenman and Elisa Iturbe, *Lateness* (Princeton, New Jersey,Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020). 3 and Peter Eisenman and Luis Fernandez-Galiano, "Peter Eisenman: "Psychoanalysis helped me to become a builder."," in *Eisenman Deconstruido*, Architectura Viva: Retratos (Madrid: Architectura Viva, 2021).

[3] Peter Eisenman, "Site: The meaning of place in art and architecture", *Design quarterly* p. 16, or in the transcribed debate between him and Christopher Alexander from 1982, "if a window is the right size a building is merely a building", and from an interview with Iman Ansari, Architectural Review. 26.04.2013

[4] Jeffrey Kipnis, "Twisting the Separatrix," *Assemblage* 14, no. 14 (1991), https://doi.org/10.2307/3171098. Also published in: Jacques Derrida, *Chora L works : Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*, ed. Peter Eisenman, Jeffrey Kipnis, and Thomas Leeser (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997). 138

[5] Peter Eisenman, "Autonomy and the Will to the Critical," *Assemblage* 41 (2000). 90

[6] As an example: See Anthony Vidler's discussion on Emil Kaufmann and his definition of a will to autonomy after Kant. It is a discussion of the existence of architecture. Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the immediate present : inventing architectural modernism*, Writing architecture series, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2008).

whether one should conceive of an architectural work as a physical building, mental contents in the architect's mind or as an abstract immaterial entity. The dilemma need not necessarily be explicitly stated, but an architect's or theorist's stance can nevertheless be inferred from an analysis of the arguments he or she makes. Descriptions of how architecture ought to be, what form it should take, how it should perform, what meanings it should convey, or any other prescriptive principles, rely on and reveal assumptions about this ontological dilemma. The works of Peter Eisenman are no exception. His position in the dilemma is the topic of this chapter, and I will address his specific tactics and different ways of producing and explaining architecture which could clarify his assumptions about ontology and how they have developed throughout his career. This will set the scene for the next chapters in the dissertation, which will elaborate on the problems that occur in the discussion of this overarching theme.

As we shall see later, Eisenman tends to constantly change his theories, but there are two assumptions about architecture that are persistent in his work.[7] The first assumption is that architecture is always something more than mere building, and thus more than a solution to functional requirements or structural constraints. The second is that architecture is a weak sign system, which means that there is no agreed-upon language with definite meanings.[8] This second assumption has generated both problems and possibilities for Eisenman, especially in relation to his emphasis on the contradictory nature of architecture, whereby architectural works perform as both signifier and signified at the same time. This means that architectural works are always imbued with meaning, but this meaning is in turn arbitrary and could be continuously challenged.[9] These two initial assumptions have obvious consequences for the questions that can be asked about the ontological status of architectural works. They suggest that not all buildings are architecture and that for buildings to be classified as architecture, they must have special kind of properties that not all buildings have. Architectural works are different from mere physical objects, either man-made or natural. This distinction is not the same as defining good or bad architecture, but it is rather about the definition of architecture itself and has implications for the questions about its ontological status.

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[7] See Stefano Corbo, *From Formalism to Weak Form: The Architecture and Philosophy of Peter Eisenman* (Routledge Ltd, 2016).

[8] See Eisenman's introduction in: Peter Eisenman, *Eisenman inside out : selected writings, 1963-1988*, Theoretical perspectives in architectural history and criticism, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004). xii

[9] Peter Eisenman, "There Are No Corners After Derrida," *Log*, no. 15 (2009), http://www.jstor.org/stable/41765266. 113 and Peter Eisenman, *Re:working Eisenman* (London: Academy Editions, 1993). 51

In 1959, before Eisenman went to Cambridge to study towards his PhD, James Sterling told him: "you are a fine designer, but you know absolutely nothing about architecture"[10] This statement exemplifies that architecture is as an intellectual endeavor where the work of architecture is clearly elevated from the craft of design of buildings. For Eisenman, the object of architecture is closely connected to ideas, which means that he rejects the definition of architecture as purely physical buildings. The aim of this chapter is therefore to analyze Eisenman's position on the nature of existence of architectural works. In order to do this, I must first clarify the origins of the ontological dilemma and possible ways it could be answered. This has consequences for the definition of architecture and especially how one could ascribe meaning to works of architecture.

### 1.2 The ontological dilemma

The aim of ontological discussions is to answer the fundamental question about being, or of what exists.[11] This necessarily raises the question of where it exists, and what we can count as reality. Traditional problems in ontology have been concerned with both the ways entities such as numbers, geometrical objects, concepts, and propositions, and of ordinary objects such as cats, dogs, houses, chairs, and apples exist. A standard ontological dilemma pertains to the determination of the ways objects exist, and whether they have existence independently or are dependent on the workings of human or supra-human consciousness. The question that needs to be answered for architects and architectural theorists is thus if a work of architecture is dependent on the human mind, or if it is strictly mind independent. In addition, one needs to answer whether architecture has an immaterial or material existence. These questions are seldom explicitly addressed by architectural theorists, but they are inevitably lurking in the background of any attempt at defining architecture and discussing its theory. For instance, if architecture is defined as mere building, then one could assume that architecture has a mind-independent physical existence. But if one, as Eisenman does, defines architecture as something other than mere building, and states that it is about ideas, then one could assume that architecture has a mind-dependent existence, or maybe these ideas exist independently of

[10] Mathew Ford, Jeffrey Kipnis, and Peter Eisenman, *By other means : notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman*, vol. notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman (Leiden: GAA Foundation, 2016).

[11] Thomas Hofweber, "Logic and Ontology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/logic-ontology/. For an application of the problem to architecture on should look at: Roman Ingarden, "The architectural work," in *Ontology of the Work of Art,* translated by Raymond Meyer with John T. Goldthwait, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989.)

human minds. One way or another, this leads to problems of how we could have a shared understanding of these architectural ideas, and especially how we attribute meanings to architectural works. So, this dependency or independency on the mind becomes an important theoretical problem that requires classification. Ultimately, there are three possible assumptions that Eisenman could make regarding the ontological status of architectural works: 1. He thinks that architectural works have physical existence. 2. He thinks that architectural works have extra-mental immaterial and platonic existence. 3. He thinks that architectural works are contents of mental states.

As mentioned above, the basis for the discussion is one of the initial assumptions Eisenman made about architecture, which suggests that architecture is more than mere building, and thus something more than or different from the material realization of the built work. This was a distinction Eisenman first made in his dissertation, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, where he specifically distinguished between the perceptual and the conceptual aspects of architecture.[12] He gave primacy to the latter, but the question is what these conceptual aspects are for Eisenman.

In philosophy, the standard understanding of concepts, as described by Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence in their survey of philosophical theories of concepts, is that they are "the building blocks of thought."[13] Generally, concepts could be defined as the contents of our thoughts that provide meanings to words, which would entail that words express concepts. According to Laurence and Margolis, the ontology of concepts can be conceived of in two ways, either as *mental representations* or as *abstract objects.*[14] So, when Eisenman uses "the conceptual" as the basis for architecture, the unavoidable question is whether Eisenman assumes that this "conceptual" in architecture has a mental existence, that architecture's conceptual nature is mental, which means that the concepts he is talking about are situated in someone's mind, or whether he thinks that they exist somewhere else, in some abstract and immaterial platonic realm, which would suggest that the concepts are merely grasped by a human being.

Thus, for Eisenman, the ontological status of architectural works could be either thought of as mental representations, meaning that architecture exists in the minds of human beings, or in an abstract world. The latter view is compatible with numerous contemporary philosophical positions. An explicit formulation of the distinction between different "worlds"

[12] Eisenman, The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture, 55
[13] Margolis and Laurence, Concepts in Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy.
[14] Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, *Concepts : core readings* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999). 5

in which objects could have their existence is found in Karl Popper's famous lecture "Three worlds," delivered at the University of Michigan in 1978. Popper there presented a pluralist view of the universe with three "different but interacting sub-universes," or worlds.[15] World 1 consisted of physical things, world 2 was the mental or psychological world, the world of the human mind, and world 3 was "the world of the products of the human mind, such as languages; tales and stories and religious myths; scientific conjectures or theories, and mathematical constructions; songs and symphonies; paintings and sculptures."[16] Popper argued against both the materialist view, in which everything exists in the physical world 1, and the dualist view, in which everything was either physical objects of the first world or the mental objects of the second world. For Popper, the problem was how one could determine objective knowledge about things or determine objective qualities of works of art. This also pertained to the problem of how one could have a shared understanding of concepts, which essentially were "objects" produced by human beings. In order to solve this, he expanded ontology and postulated a third world where these "objects" existed independently of individual human beings. According to Popper, this third world has causal effect on the physical first world, but it needs the second world as a sort of mediator. The abstract object of world 3 "emerges as an evolutionary product from world 2," but for it to work in physical world 1 it needs to be translated by the human mind in world 2.[17]

Popper's world 3 is obviously a variation of Plato's world of ideas (Forms). Another twentieth century example of a philosophical perspective that relied on immaterial objects is Gottlob Frege's distinction between *thoughts*, *things,* and *ideas.* Frege differentiated between the real world of *things*, existing outside the human subject, the inner mental world of *ideas,* existing in the mind of the human subject, and an immaterial timeless world of *thoughts*, also existing outside the human subject.[18] It is important to note that Frege's non-standard terminology, especially the use of the word *thoughts,* not to describe something internal to the human mind, but to describe abstract objects that exist independently on their own. He deduced the need for an immaterial "third realm" from a critique of how we use thoughts and ideas to make statements about the world, which we as human beings could agree upon. Frege was trying to answer the question of how we as human subjects can have a personal inner

[15] Karl Popper, "Three Worlds," in *The Tanner Lecture on Human values* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1978). 143.
[16] Ibid.144.
[17] Ibid. 167
[18] Gottlob Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry," *Mind* 65, no. 259 (1956). 295. First published in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus* 1918-19.

world of *ideas*, of "sense impressions, of creations of the imagination, of sensations, of feelings and moods, wishes and decisions," which is not perceived from the outer world, while we at the same time could have a shared understanding of these same imaginations, moods, or feelings.[19] For instance, how could we share an agreement about the truth or validity of an abstract mathematical theorem like the Pythagorean theorem. His argument was that if Pythagoras' theorem did not exist independently of the mental states of individual humans, then every person would have his or her individual Pythagorean theorem.

For Frege, like Popper, the problem was solved through a new definition of the contents of the mind where *thoughts* were defined as a special kind of content which was neither things of the material world nor mental.[20] These *thoughts* were rather to be conceived of as *abstract objects* existing on their own in an immaterial third realm. The connection between this abstract *thought-content* and the subjective mental representation was for Frege insufficient to account for how we could consider the contents of our mind to be true or false. For instance, if we did not have this shared third realm, then it would not be clear how we could agree on the truth or falsity of the Pythagorean theorem. If it is a mental *idea*, if Pythagoras' theorem is merely a mental content, it is "my personal Pythagorean theorem", the content of my own consciousness, and it does not consider other people at all. Only if it were an independent *thought* that we as human beings apprehend, and not a subjectively produced idea, could we have the possibility of a shared true thought. Frege argued that the contents of our thoughts had to be *abstract objects*, immaterial and supra-human. *Thoughts* are thus something we merely grasp from this immaterial realm rather than produce in our own minds. In this case concepts could be interpreted as the meanings of a psychological state, but not the psychological state itself since they are only apprehended by the mind and are not produced by it. They exist on their own.

The alternative view of concepts, as Laurence and Margolis pointed out, is to regard them as *mental representations*, which is often called the 'classical' view of concepts.[21] The position that concepts are mental representations follows the representational theory of mind (RTM) and takes as a starting point the view that thinking occurs in an internal system of representations.[22] For instance, a belief about a house to be painted red must include a

[19] Ibid. 297
[20] Ibid. P.302
[21] Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, "The Ontology of Concepts-Abstract Objects or Mental Representations?," *Noûs (Bloomington, Indiana)* 41, no. 4 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2007.00663.x.
[22] Ibid. 562

"structured psychological entity" involving more basic representations about both a house, paint, and redness. From this point of view human psychology and the biological functioning of the brain constitute the possibility of a shared understanding of concepts and make these concepts basic representations. As for the relation between words and concepts, it is assumed that the meaning of words is the mental content they express. This mental content is the concept or combination of concepts which together form a proposition, which is the meaning of a sentence. There is nevertheless no unambiguous way in which words express concepts because a word could express many concepts.[23]

In summary, the two understandings of concepts differ in their solution to the problems of how one could reach a shared understanding of concepts based on the workings of the mind of individual human beings. In the understanding of concepts as *abstract objects*, there is a problem with the explanation of the connection between thought-contents and mental representations. This means that the concepts of redness or a house are grasped by the mind from an immaterial realm existing independently of human beings.[24] The alternative mentalist view identifies concepts by their classificatory criteria, and two persons share the same concept insofar as their concepts define the same classificatory criteria. Thus understood, concepts exist only in the minds of human beings. This discussion about the two definitions of concepts illustrates and has direct consequences for the ontological dilemma in Eisenman's understanding of the conceptual in architecture. If concepts and propositions are what gives words and sentences their meaning, then the architectural concepts could be translated into what gives architecture its meaning. If the architectural concept is what defines architecture for Eisenman, the question is what these concepts are and what Eisenman assumed about their ontology. Does he expand the ontology of architecture into an abstract immaterial realm like the proponents of a theory of concepts as abstract objects, like Popper and Frege, or does he believe that the biological and psychological workings of the mind are sufficient to attribute meanings and concepts to architecture? What is Eisenman talking about when he discusses architectural works and their meanings?

### 1.3 Architecture's Abstract Formal basis

The obvious starting point in the study of Eisenman's theoretical assumptions is his dissertation, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, from 1963. This is also where his

[23] Ibid. 88

[24] Margolis and Laurence, "The Ontology of Concepts-Abstract Objects or Mental Representations?."565

views on ontology are easiest to identify, even though they were not explicitly stated. The dissertation started with a critique of modernism and its reliance on a factually and empirically based method of solving functional requirements.[25] Eisenman's aim was to establish a *theoretical* rather than an *actual* approach to architecture. Here, his intention was to create a method of developing architectural form based on a logical and rational analysis of the form itself. In denying historical, iconographical, perceptual, or functional approaches to the justification of form, Eisenman wanted to secure a more stable objective basis for architecture. He wrote in the introduction:

> The principles in this discussion are to be thought of as being universally valid. Moreover, the contention will be that formal considerations are basic to all architecture regardless of style, and that these considerations derive from the formal essence of any architectural situation. It will provide a means of communication evolved from this absolute basis; a language that will communicate the nature of the formal essence of any architecture. [26]

The discussion in the preceding section makes it difficult to avoid questions about the ontology, which makes the universal validity of these principles possible and that enables communication about the "formal essence of any architecture." What are these principles and essences? Eisenman's assumption was that architecture was in essence the giving of form, but again, what is the ontology of these forms? Even if he acknowledged the importance of intent, structure, function and technics, form was the primary element in the hierarchy.[27] For Eisenman, the making of architecture pertained to the use of a formal language, whereby the original idea was supposed to be communicated from its author through a means of expression to a receiver.[28] It was a definition of architecture which gave primacy to a formal ideal in which its nature was the main interest. It is precisely this nature which is worthy of investigation, and the question is thus in what way Eisenman established the general ontology of architecture by giving emphasis to the formal ideal. In other words: what kind of ontological position underwrites the systematic and logical way Eisenman treated form in his

[25] Peter Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture," (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 1963/2006).1, See also the presentation of the work in Sean Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). 64
[26] Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture." 19
[27] Ibid. 33
[28] Ibid. 25

dissertation? The important issue for this discussion is his definition of an essential formal system which provided a method for analyzing and subsequently producing architecture.

Initially, Eisenman's dissertation was a critique of functionalism, but it was not a critique of modernist architecture. As the title suggests, Eisenman sought to find another basis for architecture which was not dependent on utilitarian properties. This was of critical importance "since our social economic and technological environment has become so overwhelmingly distended that no significant order can be perceived by the individual," and because the continuous development of new technology went beyond the architect's ability to utilize it.[29] Eisenman saw that the response to this problem in architecture tended to be a withdrawal to self-expression and the personal workings of the architect's mind. Consequently, he wanted to define a more absolute objective order.[30] A definition of a universal basis was therefore one of the aims of Eisenman's dissertation. However, as we shall see, the form-giving principles which followed this universal basis did not necessarily produce a fixed and universally true architecture.

The first and most crucial move for Eisenman was to make a distinction between *generic* and *specific* form. The former was described to provide an absolute formal reference for the latter, which was the specific design and configuration of a building. Generic form consisted of two organizational categories, central and linear, and four further fundamental themes, volume, mass, surface and movement. [31] A building in its specific form was for Eisenman a product of intent and function with structural and technical ramifications, and it was the giving of form to these elements that defined architecture. [32] But this giving of form did not emerge from the solution of functional needs, an architect's intention, structural or technical requirements. Rather, it developed from *its own* inherent principles.[33] One of the main points for Eisenman was that the giving of form was "far more than the making of beautiful or aesthetically pleasing shapes because it only satisfied perceptual and not conceptual aspects." [34] Since form had primacy in the hierarchy of architectural production, it was the defining property for architecture. Generic form was "here understood to mean form thought of in a Platonic sense, as a definable entity with its own inherent laws."[35] They were

[29] Ibid. 29
[30] Eisenman refers to this as *mannerism* and cites Colin Rowe's article Mannerism and Modern Architecture, see Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture." 29
[31] Ibid. 57
[32] Ibid. 39
[33] See, for instance, a discussion of this by Sean Keller, Automatic architecture, p. 9
[34] Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture." My italics
[35] Ibid. 33

primary geometric elements, and their universal nature was conceived of as an ideal which worked as a "conceptual reference for the physical manifestation of a physical form." [36] At this point it is evident that the "conceptual reference," that which separates architecture from building, most likely should be interpreted to have abstract, immaterial, non-mental existence, making it "Platonic" as he says himself. For Eisenman, it was important that what he called the "conceptual" secured a universally valid formal system that denied arbitrary aspects and was free of any subjective human participation and evaluation. This meant that the conceptual basis was the generic form of architecture, and it worked as architecture's absolute reference.[37] This generic form provided the possibility for an autonomy of architecture, and in order to be absolute it had to exist in an abstract ideal realm. This means that Eisenman was quite explicit about the definition of generic form as abstract and ideal, but for architecture in general this was not so straightforward because architectural works consisted of both the generic and the specific form.

If architectural works are to be considered as Platonic abstract entities with perfect form in the immaterial realm, then drawings, models and the final building were merely expressions of this perfect form. According to Eisenman, the architecture of buildings was defined by the implied relationship between specific form and generic form. In this sense the abstract, immaterial and non-mental Platonic generic form provided the basis for architectural autonomy, but this was not sufficient to claim that the work of architecture existed in its totality in this Platonic realm. Architecture relied on generic form, which provided both certain rules and also worked as a basic reference. The connection between a building and the workings of generic form thus became the important aspect. For Eisenman, architecture existed in the "logical interaction of formal concepts",[38] and these concepts were seen as guiding architectural form-making. A cube was, for instance, considered a generic formal concept and its workings were described as such:

> The cube considered as a generic antecedent, has its own formal essence: equal axes, equal sides, etc... This provides the initial *conceptual* ordering, from which the syntax or rules, of a formal system is evolved. This cube also has generic properties (volume, mass, surface) which provide the *perceptual* basis for the development of this vocabulary. The vocabulary and the

[36] Ibid. 85
[37] Ibid. 321
[38] Eisenman 1963/2006 p.17

> grammar, its different uses in specific situations, are both ordered by the syntax, their specific order deriving from the combination of both perceptual and conceptual requirements.[39]

For Eisenman, it was important to overcome or present a critique of any of the extrinsic properties of architecture which he considered to be perceptual and aesthetic aspects. This meant that the form was to be understood mentally and intellectually, and not merely perceived.[40] Consequently, when Eisenman was writing about the conceptual, the ideal, the formal essence, or the generic form (Eisenman uses all these notions to refer to the same things), he described something that was either mentally construed or mentally recognized. In his denial of the subjective and personal, this must mean that the conceptual or generic form relied either on a capacity in any human being to understand the "conceptual" referent by looking at a building, and in his view this capacity is innate.[41] Grasping the architecture of a building required a mental activity, it occurred in the human mind, but its legitimacy depended on a Platonic, immaterial and abstract world. This coincides with Popper's definition of world 3 objects which "always must be *grasped* or *understood* by a *mind* before they lead to human actions, and to changes in our physical environment, such as the building of airports or of aeroplanes."[42] For Popper, one needed world 2 (the mental world) in order to allow world 3 objects to have "causal influence" on the physical world. The difference, at least at this point in Eisenman's career, was that Eisenman did not define the generic form as created by or emerging out of the mind of human beings as Popper did. Rather, generic form was just out there, in the abstract, immaterial third world. It thus preexisted any human intervention.

Eisenman provided examples to support his theory with formal analysis of works by Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto and Guiseppe Terragni. They were analyzed using plans and axonometric drawings with arrows and lines showing "pressures" from the site which interacted with the primary workings of the generic formal elements, which in turn dictated the specific form of the buildings.[43] For Eisenman, the building in itself only became

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[39] Ibid. 95. Original italics

[40] House I and II Peter Eisenman, "Notes on Conceptual Architecture: Towards a Definition," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971/2004). 13

[41] Eisenman wrote: "it does not depend entirely on the observer's particular cultural background, his subjective perceptions, or his particular mood at a given time, all of which condition his usual experience of an actual environment, but rather depends on his innate capacity to understand formal structures." Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture."

[42] Popper, "Three Worlds." 164

[43] Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism*, 66

architecturally interesting when one could read these forces mentally. For instance, Le Corbusier's Pavillon Suisse in Paris contained two generic formal types, the *centroidal* spiral and the *linear* slab block, and "it was the linear volume that provides the dominant perceptual reference, but it was the spiral or partial pinwheel that provides the dominant conceptual reference."[44] The entrance volume of the building in its centroidal form initiated a spiraling movement which was "pulled through" the dominant axis of the linear block, which in its generic form suggested a different system of movement. The result was according to Eisenman a "perceptual dissociation of function in the volumetric organization."[45] Since the generic state of the centroidal spiral movement was different from the generic state of an otherwise linear block, it created a distortion of the conceptual understanding of the building. This distortion introduces the question of whether the total work of architecture exists in a Platonic, immaterial realm, or if it was just the generic form and the subsequent rules that existed in that realm. It is nevertheless evident that in his view there is some abstract (in this sense Platonic) form or abstract object which provides the works of architecture with a stable ground or basis. In Eisenman's analysis of the Pavillon Suisse, it was the relationship between the specific form of a building and the workings of the ideal generic form that was of importance. This suggests that it was the relationship that was architecturally relevant, but it is unclear what this entails for the ontology of architectural works. If we use Popper's three worlds, architecture could exist both as a mental world 2 object and as a world 3 object, which is a product of the human mind, but with extramental existence.

To try to understand Eisenman's position, it might be appropriate to present one of Eisenman's contemporaries who worked on similar problems. Like Eisenman, in the early 1960s Christopher Alexander was working on his PhD-thesis on the basis of form in architecture. Eisenman said that it directly contributed to the decision to work on his own doctoral thesis, and after reading a draft of Alexander's work he was "infuriated" and decided to go against Alexander's arguments in his own dissertation.[46] So, let us consider what Alexander proposed. In *Notes on the Synthesis of Form,* which was based on his dissertation, Alexander was seeking to find a method to produce architecture based on "natural" principles

[44] Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture." 147
[45] Ibid. 149
[46] See Christopher Alexander Peter Eisenman, "The Debate: Contrasting Concepts of Harmony in Architecture," in *Studio Works 7 (Harvard university Graduate School of Design)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Also described in Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* 64

and a rational assessment of context and function.[47] The design of a building was supposed to be done through a combination of the analysis of a functional problem by breaking it apart and the designer's ability to synthesize it into a unified entity.[48] It was about solving the complex architectural process by introducing a conceptual map for understanding a previously sub-conscious design method. Both Eisenman and Alexander sought a logical way to produce form but differed in their views on the definitions of architecture in general. Alexander, on the one hand, intended to produce form by analyzing functional and structural requirements and combine them in mathematical formulas. On the other hand, Eisenman intended to bracket out those requirements in order to find architectural autonomy. In this way architecture was for Alexander produced through a rigorous empirical analysis of the requirements of the real world and human needs, while for Eisenman architecture was formed from *its own* inherent rules. The goal for the latter was to understand the nature of form itself as opposed to the relationship of form to function or form to meaning.[49] As such, the formal manifestation of conceptual ideas was an "exposition of a set of formal relationships," which was governed by the ideal generic form.[50]

Both Alexander and Eisenman used the term "conceptual" to secure some form of authority for architecture. It was a way of giving order and hierarchy to a design process through a conceptualization intended to give a shared understanding of the architectural work. For Alexander, this conceptualization was based on analyzing and abstracting from the real physical world, thus making the outside material realm the basis for the concepts he produced. For Eisenman, architecture had its own inherent logic and got its autonomy from an ideal abstraction. The design method that Alexander developed therefore had the goal of providing a certain architectural response, but for Eisenman theory was open ended with a possible infinity of formal configurations as long as it was developed in a logical manner, and had a basis in or relation to generic form. [51] These methods were developed in the years after Eisenman finished his dissertation, and through his continued suggestions that architecture relied on a platonic, suprahuman, and immaterial basis.

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[47] Alexander tried to relate the design process to a process of biological evolution where the goal is to find the "right fit." Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). 17

[48] Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*. 116

[49] Peter Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings: 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971/2004). 29

[50] Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II." 23

[51] Ibid. 25

### 1.4 Formal Relationships, the Abstract and the Real

In the late 60s and early 70s Eisenman developed his theory through the production of a series of what he called "cardboard" houses. These early houses had a didactic function, and they were supposed to "question the nature of our reality."[52] The use of the term cardboard architecture suggested that the buildings did not necessarily exist as buildings but could just as easily be models and that the relationship between the building and the design process was of interest. Primacy was given to "generating and transforming a set of primitive or integral relationships into a more complex set of specific relationships which become the actual building."[53] This meant that the commitment was not to the actual building but to the possibilities that were inherent in the design process, and the "final" building was merely an iteration of this process. In the explanations of House I and House II Eisenman stressed the capacity to "understand" opposed to "experience" architecture, whereby the primary concern for architecture was: "the use of physical form as a marking to produce, as it were, a new mental image from that we are actually seeing."[54] The autonomy of the architectural object could neither be provided by function or meaning, nor could it be fully provided by the shape and form of the physical object. The autonomy was thus connected to how a work of architecture pointed to or showed its own inherent workings. This autonomy was based on a structural ordering resembling the syntactic structure in language and was thus different from the semantic meaning of words. This structure was meant to provide some fundamental basis, and the question is if the existence of this fundamental basis was defined in accordance with the implied assumptions of his dissertation, or if the basis suggested some other ontological assumptions.

After his dissertation Eisenman had become aware of the linguistic theories of Noam Chomsky and the difference between deep and surface structures, which resemble Eisenman's generic and specific from.[55] Chomsky postulated or argued for a genetically preprogrammed language organ in the brain which provided a biological basis for our ability to make and use language.[56] For Chomsky, the acquisition of language and its complex grammar and structure, its form, could not only be based on experience, but relied on "once innate ideas and innate

[52] Peter Eisenman, "House I," in *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).15
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid. 33
[55] Ibid. 39
[56] Chomsky writes about the "innate structure of a language-acquisition device" in: Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge MIT Press, 1965). 54

principles."[57] However, there is no evidence that Eisenman was postulating a similar organ for architecture. If he was following Chomsky, architectural works had to exist as mental entities and would have required a human subject, something Eisenman was reluctant to accept. Here Eisenman is more in line with the theories of Jerrold Katz, a colleague of Chomsky at M.I.T, who saw language as neither mental nor human. Katz held the belief that languages are abstract objects, and that they have a timeless existence in an abstract, immaterial realm.[58] This was in opposition to Chomsky's biological and psychological basis, which in Eisenman's sense could not secure universality. Since subjectivity did not secure the universal formal logic, it made the autonomy of architecture unattainable. Nevertheless, Eisenman was still using Chomsky's terms "deep and surface structure" as analogies to connect the workings of architecture to the workings of language. There is no mentioning of Katz in Eisenman's work, but his views are an example showing that Eisenman's definition of architecture as an abstract entity is not completely far-fetched and that it is comparable to similar views in other fields during the era.

In his cardboard architecture, Eisenman defined the surface structure as the physical perceivable world, like Popper's world 1. The deep structure existed outside the perceivable world, and was like generic form, in what Popper called world 3. However, for Eisenman this did not mean that a physical building, the first world object, was just an instantiation of the third world object because for Eisenman they were not identical. As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, Eisenman gave primacy to the aspects which could not be seen. Even if he acknowledged that the formal relationships could exist at a perceivable and sensible level, they primarily existed at another level, where they were just known.[59] In his essay, "From Object to Relationship" from 1971, Eisenman elaborated on this known "deep structure," a term he borrowed from Chomsky, and wanted to provide a method for architecture whereby the formal "abstract relationships were conceivable as independent of the actual relationships."[60] This meant that the abstract relationships were present but not obvious in the physical building. Consequently, to "see" the abstract relationships required some form of interpretation, and it was not explicitly stated whether these abstract relationships were merely grasped from an abstract immaterial realm or if they were

[57] Ibid. 61
[58] See Jerold J. Katz, *Language and other Abstract Objects* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1980).
[59] Eisenman *Cardboard Architecture*, 31
[60] Peter Eisenman, "From Object to Relationship II: Casa Giuliani Frigerio: Giuseppe Terragni Casa Del Fascio," *Perspecta* 13/14 (1971).38

completely produced by the faculties of the mind. Eisenman made the claim that the abstract relationships was not "expressed" but only "represented" in the mind, which clearly suggests the former.[61] The difference between *expression* and *representation* was that in the former the object just exists in the mind, whereas in the latter the object is merely grasped, or it is at least governed by something more abstract.

Eisenman was thus operating with a theoretical framework where he distinguished between the physically real and the abstract, or between what Popper called world 1 and world 3. Eisenman, like Popper, relied on a second mental world, which worked as a mediator between the two. "A deep structure may not necessarily display any similarity to the surface structure. Deep structures are concerned with providing an abstract or conceptual framework for the formal regularities common to all languages."[62] The main task of architecture was to express the underlying conceptual system that established a relation between the two levels or worlds (the abstract and the real). Eisenman emphasized the importance of "shifting the primary response to form from a perceptual to a conceptual nature, from object to relationships." And these relationships were described as frontality, obliqueness, recession, elongation, compression, and shear, and were according to Eisenman "understood in the mind."[63] At the same time, his formulations contain ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions.

Eisenman's desire to establish a conceptual architecture was inspired by both previous and contemporary developments in art. In "From Object to Relationship", Eisenman mentioned artists like Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich, "which were dealing not so much with abstractions of objects as they were with structures of pure form, and thus with relationships derived from, what might be called, formal universals, or with abstractions of a conceptual nature."[64] In contrast to more figurative painters they were not making abstractions of regular objects of a perceptual nature, but where dealing with what Eisenman called the "conceptual nature." Architecture did, as mentioned, contain both perceptual surface qualities such as texture, color, shape, and what he called deep conceptual relationships such as frontality, obliqueness, recession, elongation, compression, and shear, which was understood

[61] Eisenman cites Chomsky in "From Object to Relationship II": "Deep structures are generated by a base system of rules which are concerned with an abstract order. A deep structure is implicit only; it is not expressed but only represented in the mind." Ibid. 39
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid. 38
[64] Ibid. 39 "In architecture it can be said that it is a deep structure which might provide the referent structure so that meaning might be derived from a particular relationship of specific forms."

in the mind. These relationships made the process, but not the creator, of a work more important than the final building.

Even if Eisenman took many of his ideas from artists, he needed to preserve the autonomy of architecture and distinguish it from art. Contrary to the arguments in his dissertation, he had therefore to rely on function, materiality, and other pragmatic considerations.[65] These were concerns that belonged to the actual and thus to the surface structures of architecture. He thus had to refine what the *conceptual* meant for architecture:

> To make something conceptual in architecture would require taking the pragmatic and functional aspects and placing them in a conceptual matrix, where their primary existence is no longer interpreted from the physical fact of being a bathroom or closet, but rather the functional aspect bathroom or closet becomes secondary to some primary reading as a notation in a conceptual context.

Eisenman was still holding on to an abstract universal formal logic detached from the surface structures of architecture, but as Sean Keller has noted, the acknowledgement of architecture's requirements made it necessary for Eisenman to define architecture by the contradictions and tensions between the material and the conceptual and between the "actual" and the abstract.[66]

### 1.5 The Architectural Object as Process

In Eisenman's subsequent works the problem of finding the right means to express the conceptual content became the main topic of investigation and critique. Continuing his analogies with linguistics and the philosophy of language, his occupation gradually changed from Chomskian formal universals to investigations of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. This is exemplified by what K. Michael Hays described as Eisenman's shift from a consideration of the object, the form itself, to the object "become-simulacrum of process", replacing the built object with the diagram of its procedure.[67] The translation of a mode of analysis that he had employed in his dissertation to the design of houses may have contributed to this shift, but it was not necessarily a shift in the understanding of the ontology

[65] Eisenman, "Notes on Conceptual Architecture: Towards a Definition.", also discussed in Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* 83
[66] Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* 83
[67] K. Michael Hays, *Architecture's desire : reading the late avant-garde*, Writing architecture series, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010). 51

of architecture. During the 1960s he gave "priority to the form-giving process" to produce an autonomous architecture, and it was still the understanding, rather than the perception of form that was of importance for Eisenman.[68] The question is thus what formed the basis for this understanding, and whether Eisenman changed this basis during this period.

Eisenman gradually moved away from the universal generic form during the late 1960s and early 19070s. The aim was no longer to investigate how architecture related to a generic ideal, but how architecture signified in general. For instance, in the design of House II, Eisenman employed the tactic of "structural redundancy" to emphasize how architectural elements could point to the activity of interpreting and understanding architecture.[69] This redundancy consisted of the combination of two structural systems, whereby both load-bearing walls and a grid of columns and beams produced a reading of a complete structural system. Since both systems could support the building equally well, but as Eisenman argued, both could not be read as structural at the same time, it had to force new readings. This was an activity that was supposed to take place in the mind of any reader or spectator, but it relied, like generic form, on inherent forces and formal relationships.

> If either the column or wall system can be read as non-structural at any time, they then can be seen perhaps as marks. In House II these marks have two purposes. First, because of their particular placement they produce a conceptual bi-valency between the elements themselves, and, second, they act as an implied reference to some underlying structure. [70]

Each system's function was thus to signify their own lack of function, but also to point to some of the deep structural or generic workings of architecture.

In House II Eisenman started with a cube, which was subdivided through a notational system based on conceptual references to form. These subdivisions were visualized in a set of diagrams which worked both as a generative instrument to produce form and as an explanation of the relationship between architecture's sign and its signified. Eisenman used the diagram to detach form from the programmatic concern of the signified and preserve the singularity of the architectural objects.[71] As he wrote in 1999, the aim of the process was to "displace from form its assumed necessary relationships to function, meaning and aesthetics

[68] Eisenman, "The formal basis of modern architecture." 33
[69] Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II." 37
[70] Ibid.
[71] Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, 1 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Universe Publishing, 1999). 50

without at the same time necessarily denying the presence of these conditions."[72] Although this displacement was more apparent in Eisenman's position in 1999 than in 1971, it was still a requirement for architecture precisely to show these ambiguities and not provide an easy reading of the logic of form. This was like his analysis of Le Corbusier's Pavillon Suisse, where the point was to show that there were some ideal generic workings or rules, but that these "rules" could be manipulated, changed, and countered by the "specific form" of certain architectural works. Nevertheless, the point was that these works were always analyzed and designed in relation to the overarching workings of generic form, even if they did not contribute to the production of an eternally "true" or "right" architecture.

As mentioned, Eisenman did not give consistent and clear answers to the ontological dilemma presented at the beginning of the chapter, but he gave primacy to some abstract and immaterial workings existing in a platonic realm. By favoring intrinsic formal relationships in the hierarchy, he regarded architecture to be as neutral and objective as it could be.[73] The objective representation of architecture was thus realized through axonometric drawings and diagrams which provided a non-subjective neutral point of view. In Eisenman's Cardboard Houses the process of formal development, as represented in these drawings, was far more important than the final buildings itself.[74] Both the diagrams and the axonometric drawings were viewed as "the mediation between a palpable object, the real building and architecture's interiority,"[75] and the diagram was the tool for a generative process which was based on the workings of generic form. For Eisenman, the diagram relied on the same belief that architecture always had been something other than the physical building or the subject's perception of this building. It exemplified the belief that the basis of architecture was its existence as an abstract ideal form. Therefore, architecture could only be expressed in its pure form in the drawing.[76] For Eisenman, the aim was to provide architecture with a logical foundation that was independent of the workings of the individual human being and was strictly architectural. Even if he did not unequivocally state that architectural works were defined as abstract entities, Eisenman relied on assumptions that ideal Platonic forms were governing architectural form-making.

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[72] Ibid. 51

[73] Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II."39

[74] Corbo, *From Formalism to Weak Form: The Architecture and Philosophy of Peter Eisenman*. 27

[75] See Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, 1. 27

[76] See Eisenman's description of House VI "House VI is not an object in traditional sense – that is, the result of a process – but more accurately a record of the process" in Peter Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman : Peter Eisenman complete works*, ed. Cynthia Davidson and Stan Allen (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006). 66

## 6. Post-functionalism as the modernist *Epistème*

In his essay "Post-Functionalism," from the journal *Oppositions* in 1976, Eisenman directly criticized the importance of function as the "idealist ambition of creating architecture as a kind of ethically constituted form-giving."[77] Eisenman had always been a critic of functionalism, but now he was attacking a specific humanist functionalism and the moral imperative which justified form. Functionalist architecture was for him not a part of a modern world which had made its impact in the other fields of art, and the problem was that architecture still relied on the needs of human beings.

For Eisenman, the "modernist sensibility" was to be understood as an alternative to the humanist conception of architecture, and since the consciousness of the western world had changed, architecture should follow. The modern attitude was to be understood as a displacement of man from his center in the world.[78] Man was no longer an "originating agent" and "objects" were supposed to be considered as ideas independent of man. This resembles Eisenman's early Platonic position whereby an architect was merely grasping the ideal abstract form and translating it to a real physical building. However, this Platonic position was for Eisenman aligned with the humanist world view in which architecture resembles a basic condition, giving the work of architecture a far too simple and straightforward relation between form and meaning. Architecture was rather to be understood as "a series of fragments" in an "atemporal decompositional" mode with no basic condition other than that of "multiplicity."[79] So, he came to argue against the stability implied by the Platonist view.

The argument in *Post-Functionalism* was not necessarily that architecture was supposed to deny function all together, it was rather to follow the "modernist attitudes" in providing "non-representational abstractions." This meant that architecture should not represent any function or meaning. What is meant by "meaning" in this instance will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. Regarding Eisenman's assumptions on the ontology of architectural works, this raises more questions than it answers. If the architecture of the modern world was to follow a changed consciousness or a changed attitude, he could hardly avoid discussing the nature of this consciousness or the nature of the forces changing this attitude. However, this was not addressed directly, but we might get an idea about his

[77] Peter Eisenman, "Post-Functionalism," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976/2004). 237
[78] Ibid. 237
[79] Ibid. 238

assumptions by looking at Eisenman's arguments for what architecture should do in this new modern world.

In *Post-functionalism* Eisenman relied on the theories of Michel Foucault and suggested that functionalism, which belonged to a humanist *épistème* rather than a modernist, was not in tune with the rest of the world. For Foucault, *épistème* was the total set of relations which at a given period united discursive practices and enabled the formation of knowledge.[80] The idea is that there was no certain foundational truth securing science and the human understanding of the world, only a historical-philosophical relationship between power, truth, and subject.[81] The modern *épistème* thus governed the discourse of architecture as well. The task for Eisenman, as he saw it, was thus to bring architecture in tune with the "modern" *épistème*. This did not mean that one was supposed to establish a new relationship between man and object because this was just another form of authority, but the point was rather to make a continuous criticism of this relationship.[82] This critical attitude, which Eisenman saw as crucial for the modern *épistème*, was viewed as a virtue by Foucault, who defined it as "The art of being governed not quite so much."[83] Foucault's emphasis was on the criticism of the power structures inherent in society and this criticism was both an acknowledgment of the importance of the governing structures that exist and a challenge to these very same structures.

In architecture, Eisenman saw the continuous questioning of conventions as the performance of this critical attitude outlined by Foucault. These conventions evolved throughout history, and Eisenman's position in "Post-Functionalism" relied on the view that architecture was a cultural activity dependent on human interaction within the system of an *épistème*. It was the systemic relationships which provided knowledge and made a certain theory acceptable. Coupled with a desire for autonomy, this acknowledgment gave Eisenman

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[80] « Par *épistème*, on entend, en fait, l'ensemble des relations pouvant unir, à une époque donnée, les pratiques discursives qui donnent lieu à des figures épistémologiques, a des sciences éventuellement à des systèmes formalises. » Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1969). 250 Translated as: "By episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems." In Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M Sheridan Smith (New York: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1972).191

[81] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," lecture delivered to the Société française de Philosophie in May 1978. Published : Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique," in *Qu'est-ce que la critique: suivi de La culture de soi* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2015). Translated as: "What is Critique?" trans. Lysa Hochroth, in The Politics of Truth, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York 1997) 61

[82] This is hinted at by Eisenman, in Eisenman, "Post-Functionalism."where he discusses the dialectical process of form-giving.

[83] «Et je proposerais donc, comme toute première définition de la critique, cette caractérisation générale : l'art de n'être pas tellement gouverné.» in: Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique." 37

the contradictions he needed to perform his critical project. No inhabitant, viewer or architect could provide the certain meaning to the autonomous architectural object, but the architectural object was nevertheless always meaningful, which meant that meanings were independent of the mental states of the viewers of the architectural works. Architecture was thus produced through an impossible search for a non-existing architectural autonomy, which in turn forced Eisenman to replace autonomy with another idea.

> That there is no autonomous, fully defined architecture, suggests the possibility of architecture's open-ended capacity for displacement, for new possibilities of meaning. The attempt at autonomy was a dream of illusory presence, of the denial of absence, of the "other." Were autonomy possible, there would be no reason to undertake the process at all.... The original goal of autonomy, once the source of the transformational design strategies, is no longer considered tenable. Rather than see the transformations as logical processes of discovery, they can be seen as processes of invention, fictions constructed in an attempt to dislocate the work from the tradition of presence in the architectural object. Absence, as an aspect of text, opened the possibility of a true dislocation of architectural conventions while remaining within the metaphysical discourse of architecture. It was this idea [absence] which progressively supplanted autonomy in the work after House VI.[84]

For Eisenman, the essence of architecture, sought out in the search for autonomy, was that it had no essence, and that this in-essentialism should be apparent in the architecture where inherent contradictions should be emphasized. The design of House VI, built in 1975, preceded the position suggested in *Post-Functionalism,* whereby the communication of a logic of form was replaced by ambiguity and "displacement."[85] Eisenman was aware of his changed position: "In House II and IV the architectural notations existed to produce a mental landscape and suggest an alternative reality and an alternative experience and meaning of architecture. But in House VI, the experience of the physical environment does not lead to any mental structure."[86] From this statement it can be read that Eisenman's earliest houses were made with the assumption that architecture either had its existence in the mind of human beings, or that it had Platonic existence that could be read from the physical structures. Since architecture had always been something other than physical building for Eisenman, the

[84] Peter Eisenman, *Houses of cards*, ed. Rosalind Krauss and Manfredo Tafuri (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 182
[85] Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* . 87
[86] Cardboard architecture. Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II."

negation in House VI of this mental structure was not an acknowledgment of architecture as physical reality. "Rather, it becomes an exploration of the range of potential manipulations latent in the nature of architecture, unavailable to our consciousness because they are obscured by cultural preconceptions."[87] In House VI, Eisenman's tactic was to make a "reduction of metaphor", thereby challenging initial architectural assumptions about domestic living by making a house with a column between the seats at the dining table, a stair in the ceiling and a facade on the inside. For Eisenman, the main task of the house was to make us aware of our mind's ability to conceptualize physical facts in certain ways.[88]

For Eisenman, there was a need for architecture to mean something, or more precisely the need for architecture to present a certain mental conception about itself. House VI was produced to show that both the physical building and the conceptual understanding of the building were ambiguous. The architecture thus both affirmed and criticized the division between the sensible physical world and the intelligible mental world, giving primacy to neither. The design of House VI was underscored the differences and ambiguities inherent in such a division without proposing a solution or another existence for architecture. In his dissertation, Eisenman was, as outlined above, trying to find a universal basis of architectural form, but this changed in the mid-seventies. The criticism of any authority in architecture became his main task.[89] This view rested firmly on the belief that architecture had to follow the development of the world, which was constantly changing. This is obviously present in Eisenman's interest in Deconstruction. In the next section I will give an overview of the implications of this theoretical approach that are significant for our discussion here, especially since it had substantial consequences for Eisenman's understanding of architecture.

### 1.7 Deconstructivism

In 1967 Jacques Derrida published three books. *De la Grammatologie* (Of Grammatology), published in English in 1976, *L'écriture et la difference* (Writing and Difference), published in English in 1978, and *Les Voix et le Phenomene* (Speech and Phenomena), published in English in 1973. These works comprise the core of Derrida's thinking, and the main terms and concepts in his theories are contained in these books. Derrida did not approach standard philosophical problems and questions directly, and every argument he posed was veiled in

[87] House IV, project description in Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman : Peter Eisenman complete works*.
[88] Ibid.
[89]Suzanne Frank describes this change in: Suzanne Frank, *IAUS: An Insider's Memoir* (New York: Self published, 2010). 107

ambiguity. Since the positions he took were rarely explicit, it is unlikely that exhaustive explication of his theoretical views can be provided here.[90] Derrida's project was precisely about the impossibility to pin something down. However, if it is possible to assert a general theme for Derrida's writings, it must be, in wide terms, the critique of center and origin. For him, it rested on the acknowledgement that a center requires a periphery, which in turn is to say that there are always two sides of a coin, and the point is not to settle what is the right side, but rather to show the impossibility of making a correct decision.[91] For instance, a discussion on the nature of being always involves a reference to the non-being. This non-being was deemed by Plato impossible to refer to without the danger of a paradox because when referring to something one must attribute something to it, and thus assume that it exists.[92] These sorts of inevitable contradictions in philosophy were handled with two different attitudes: they could either be or should be eliminated, or they were just inevitable and deeply rooted in the core of philosophical activity. One of the reasons for this was based on the workings of language, and if we are to understand anything about Derrida's theoretical position on language, I must give a brief outline of the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, which Derrida both elaborated and in turn criticized.

Saussure in his *Cours de Linguistic Générale (Course in general linguistics)* proposed a novel theory of language, or more specifically a science of signs called semiology, which emphasized the inner structure of language rather than its relation to the outside world. According to Saussure, the sign consisted of two inseparable parts, the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*), where the former was the acoustic image, or sound-image, and the latter was the concept.[93] Both these parts were thought of as psychological entities existing in the mind, like two sides of paper: if one cuts one side, one cuts the other as well. In addition, the relationship between signifier and signified was completely arbitrary, which meant that language was structured around the differences between the signs and the agreed-upon definitions of words in this system. As such, there seems to be no natural relation between

[90] See Vernon W. Cisney, *Derrida's Voice and Phenomenon*, Edinburgh philosophical guides series, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). 3, and Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction : theory and practice*, Rev. ed. ed., New accents, (London: Routledge, 1991). 18, for a similar assessment of Derrida's position.
[91] In a readers guide of Writing and Difference, Sarah Wood explains that Derrida's was trying to reach a point where he did not know where he was going, and thus was dealing with an endless uncertainty. Sarah Wood, *Derrida's Writing and Difference: A Reader's guide* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009). 6
[92] Barry Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction*, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks, (New York: Routledge, 2006). 19
[93] Ferdinand De Saussure, *Cours De Linguistique Généralé*, 5 vols., vol. 5 (Paris: Éditions Payot, 1916).

words and objects, or words and concepts, which meant that there was no *transcendental signified*, a source for ultimate meaning and origin, in Saussure's semiology.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida gave a critique of Saussure, claiming that there indeed was an implicit metaphysical dimension to Saussure's semiology.[94] Since language was completely social for Saussure, this underscored the division between the social and the natural, a division which for Derrida was an indication of a metaphysical commitment for Saussure.[95] Since primacy was given to one side in the opposition between nature/culture, in an act of eliminating contradiction, there was a possibility for a center, an origin or a *transcendental signified*. Derrida got this idea from Jean Jacques Rousseau's claim that the purely social language emerged from human nature, but that the separation of nature and culture created a contradiction that must be denied. The question Derrida asked was: "who will ever say if the lack of within nature is within nature, if the catastrophe by which Nature is separated from itself is still natural?"[96] So, if language were purely social, while the social came from nature, then the social would be a part of the natural and could not be opposed to it. Since Saussure's definition of language rested on the same metaphysical opposition between nature and culture, and since he gave primacy to the structure, the unchangeable system of language, he confirmed a Platonist metaphysics which Derrida both pointed out and criticized. The problem was the origin of language, or "the passage from the state of nature to the state of language," which was outside the "grasp of the simple alternative of genesis and structure, of fact and principle, of historical and philosophical reason."[97] For Derrida this problem could not simply be solved, and the point was not to solve it, but rather to explicate the unsolvable and to allow contradiction.[98] This is an illustration of Derrida's tendency to dismantle any position, making all truth claims open for debate, showing his inclination towards criticizing any metaphysical claims, which could be summarized by his continuous critique of the "metaphysics of presence."

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[94] Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1967).63

[95] This is explained by Barry Stocker. See: Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction*. 27

[96] «Qui dira jamais si le manque dans la nature est *dans* la nature, si la catastrophe par laquelle la nature *s'écarte d'elle-même* est encore naturelle?», in Derrida, *De La Grammatologie*. 364. The translation is from Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1976). 258

[97] «Le passage de l'état de nature à l'état de langage et de société, l'avènement de la supplémentarité, se tient donc hors de prise pour la simple alternative de la genèse et de la structure, du fait et du droit, de la raison historique et de la raison philosophique.» Derrida, *De La Grammatologie*.366, Translation: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

[98] See Robert Bernasconi, "Supplement," in *Jacques Derrida: Key Concepts*, ed. Claire Colebrook (New York: Routledge, 2014). for an explanation of this.

With deconstruction Derrida argued that the tradition of western metaphysics was constituted and defined by contradictions and paradoxes. So, when Derrida did his deconstructive reading of a philosopher or theorist, he not only affirmed the philosopher's specific position, but also affirmed that the philosopher had a commitment to the contrary position. Deconstruction was not about the either/or in these positions, but a way to criticize the very idea of these sorts of binaries. Consequently, since one could not talk of presence without absence, since nature was only understood in relation to culture, or being in relation to non-being, then neither being, presence or nature was anything in itself. For Derrida, absence thus became as important as presence since his point was to criticize the privilege given to one side of the binary oppositions.[99] This acknowledgement was comparable to Saussure's claim that the meaning of words was based on differences. For Derrida, language was thought of as this system of differences, and the meaning of a word was therefore defined by what it does not mean. Deconstruction was thus a way to unmask the complicated ways language worked in the creation of philosophical binaries and was used as a strategy of emancipation from the hegemony and authority of philosophical discourse.[100] Central in this strategy was the critique of logocentrism. Derrida criticized the position that meaning and truth were determined by some sort of external natural signifier, an original, and that this natural signifier was connected to speech.

> All the metaphysical determinations of truth, end even the one beyond metaphysical onto-theology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense it is understood: in the pre-Socratic or the philosophical sense, in the sense of god's infinite understanding or in the anthropological sense, in the pre-Hegelian or post-Hegelian sense. Within this logos, the original and essential link to the *phoné* has never been broken.[101]

Derrida pointed to the connection between the soul and the mind and the "natural signification" between the soul/mind and the logos, which was a relationship of "conventional

[99] See Norris, *Deconstruction : theory and practice*.
[100] Ibid. 19
[101] « Toutes les déterminations métaphysiques de la vérité et même celle à laquelle nous rappelle Heidegger, par-delà l'ontothéologie métaphysique, sont plus ou moins immédiatement inséparables de l'instances du logos ou d'une raison pensée dans la descendance du logos, en quelque sens qu'on l'entende : au sens présocratique ou au sens philosophique, au sens de l'entendement infini de Dieu ou au sens anthropologique, au sens pré-hegelien ou au sens post-hegelien. Or dans ce logos, le lien originaire et essentiel à la *phonè* n'a jamais été rompu. » Derrida, *De La Grammatologie*. 21 and in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 11.

symbolization," but this conventional symbolization needed a first convention which related all signification to a natural or universal signification produced in spoken language. What Derrida proposed with his usual oppositional attitude was that writing was as important as speech, or as original as speech, and the point was to "make it function without the presence of the speaking subject."[102] This decentering of the subject is precisely what Eisenman had been given attention in his architecture theory.

In the English-speaking world, Derrida is more known and used in fields outside of academic philosophy. Because of the many themes that Derrida discussed during his career (art, literature, politics, law and briefly architecture), it has been disputed whether he was a philosopher at all. The alternative view, as Barry Stocker has argued, is that since Derrida was mostly dealing with philosophical questions, he was a philosopher through and through.[103] So, when he discussed literature or architecture, it was to make a philosophical remark about it. Derrida regarded himself incompetent in matters of the arts and architecture, and it is clear, as we shall see in chapter three, that his collaborations with architects easily ended up with misunderstandings.[104] Nevertheless, for Derrida, architecture was interesting because it held the possibility to be a "force of resistance to philosophical authority, and to the philosophical discourse on it."[105] Consequently, Derrida claimed that a resistance to *logocentrism* was much more likely to appear in the "spatial arts" such as architecture than in other fields. Even if these arts were silent or mute, meaning that they did not speak, they held the possibilities of "virtual discourses." This meant that these works of art and architecture were still open for interpretation, and that there was a hegemonical authority of interpretation and meaning that was open for deconstruction. Since there was a "little discourse" somewhere in the visual or spatial arts, there was a "textual" dimension to it, and if there was "text," a work was open for deconstruction. As Derrida claimed:

> In any case, to be quite categorical, I would say that the idea that deconstruction should confine itself to the analysis of the discursive text – I know the idea is widespread – is really either a gross misunderstanding or a political strategy to limit deconstruction to matters of

[102] Ibid. 10
[103] Barry Stocker, Routledge guide to Derrida on Deconstruction, Introduction, 4
[104] Derrida in interview with Peter Brunette and David Willis, "In the first place, when I say that I am incompetent I say it frankly, sincerely, because it is true, because I don't know a lot about architecture, and as far as film goes my knowledge is only of the most average and general kind." 9
[105] Ibid. 10

> language. Deconstruction starts with the deconstruction of logocentrism, and thus to want to confine it to linguistic phenomena is the most suspect of operations.[106]

However, in a discussion with Christopher Norris, Derrida explained the difficulties of just appropriating deconstruction directly to architecture.

> Deconstruction comes about when you have deconstructed some architectural philosophy, some architectural assumption – for instance, the hegemony of aesthetic, of beauty, the hegemony of usefulness, of functionality, of living, of dwelling. But then you have to reinscribe these motifs within the work. You can't (or you shouldn't) simply dismiss those values of dwelling, functionality, beauty and so on.[107]

Architecture was thus open for deconstruction despite its spatial and non-deconstructable characteristics, not because of them. This provided a challenge for architecture. A challenge which showed the oppositional characteristics lying underneath the deconstructivist project. This was not unlike other avant-garde projects, which Eisenman admired. This oppositional avant-garde attitude will, as mentioned, be the main theme in chapter four. But first we need to ask how architecture was deconstructed, and if this deconstruction relied on and assumed a specific ontological status of architecture.

### 1.8. Deconstructive Architecture

In "Point de folie – Maintenant l'architecture," Derrida wrote specifically about architecture and his collaboration with Bernard Tschumi, who later managed to get Derrida to join Eisenman for a collaborative architectural project in Parc de la Villette in Paris.[108] In "Point de Folie," Derrida wrote about an architectural event, something he called a "writing of space," a spacing which "makes a place for the event."[109] This was the characteristics he attributed to Tschumi's Parc de la Villette project. The Parc de la Villette was an architectural project which did not only consist of constructions and buildings in which an event could happen, but the argument was that the project was the event itself. The question thus became, "is an architecture of events possible?" According to Derrida, everything came down to the

[106] Ibid. 15
[107] Norris, *Deconstruction : theory and practice*.
[108] This collaboration will be discussed thoroughly in chapter three.
[109] Jacques Derrida, "Point de folie - Maintenant l'architecture," *AA files* no. 12 (1986). 65

question of meaning, and what happens to meaning, or to "the meaning of meaning."[110] With this attitude, the play on words and the relations between words became an important starting point for a deconstructive process. In Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, the terms *folie* (madness) or *folies* (madnesses) and *folies* (Tschumi's red structures, the follies, placed at certain points in a regular grid in the park), were hinting at several different ways to understand the meaning of architecture.

> The folies put into operation a general dislocation; they draw into everything that, until *maintenant* seems to have given architecture meaning. More precisely, everything that seems to have given architecture over to meaning. They deconstruct first of all, but not only, the semantics of architecture.[111]

The follies at Parc de la Villette were functionless constructions which criticized habitation, and thus worked to criticize what Derrida called the architecture of architecture, which was its supposedly naturalized condition. The point of this criticism meant that there could be no natural or divine origin for architecture. [112] Architecture did not "fall from sky," it was constructed, and did thus have a history. Derrida's claim was that this historicity was often hidden since architecture was thought to have a natural meaning, something rooted in the divine or platonic realm, and this had to be rejected.[113]

When Derrida wrote about the architecture of architecture in "Point de Folie," he took it for granted that it had to do with meaning. This resulted in what Derrida mentioned as four points of invariance for architecture which translated one and the same postulation:

> Architecture must have a meaning, it must present it and, through it, signify. The signifying or symbolical value of this meaning must direct the structure and syntax, the form and function of architecture. It must direct it from the outside, according to a principle (arche) a fundamental or foundation, a transcendence or finality whose locations are not themselves architectural."[114]

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] See: Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984/2004). Here he explains that the three fictions of architecture as the critique of a natural, or divine origin rooting architecture.
[113] "It goes right through us (*nous transit*) to the point that we forget its very historicity: we take it for nature. It is common sense in itself." Derrida, "Point de folie - Maintenant l'architecture." 65
[114] Ibid. 69

The four points are not explicitly defined or noted by Derrida and are therefore difficult to isolate. Nevertheless, the invariable characteristics of architecture had to do with the experience of meaning as "the law of the *oikos*," the connection of architecture to dwelling and the economy of men or gods, and generally to how we inhabit the world. Architecture was also involved with an always centered and hierarchizing nostalgia which architecture materialized in stone or wood. All these "points" hinted at some fundamental finality, and Tschumi's follies destabilized these fundamental meanings; they battled with "the meaning of architectural meaning." The point was not that the follies destroy this meaning, that they proposed a zero degree for architectural writing without finality, aesthetic aura, fundamentals, hierarchical principles, or symbolic signification, but that for Derrida they affirmed the "inevitable workings" of architectural meaning. The follies thus revealed the absence of a *transcendental signified* since they did not contain any predetermined function or form, but they still had meaning. In this sense, the ontology of architecture was closely connected to its meaning.

According to Derrida, the follies were "a narrative montage of great complexity." The arrangement of the red follies as "points" in a squared grid with connecting paths made them both the background for and interrupter of several different activities and events. For Derrida, it was an architecture of the other. It presented "neither a constative theory nor a politics nor an ethics of architecture," and by not doing any of these things, the follies encompassed all these ambitions.[115] Since there was no straightforward reading, or meaning, the follies could anticipate the architecture to come and give room for chance.

The play with words, the suggestive rather than verdictive assessments, and the emphasis on the both-and, or neither-nor characteristics of Tschumi's project, makes Derrida's essay a good illustration of the desire to show a total undecidability of meaning when it comes to architecture. The free play of meaning which occurs in the relationship between the built constructions and their context is continuously changing, and in the future they would be different. Derrida was obviously more interested in the undecidable "in-between" rather than the parts in this relationship. A primacy given to either of the parts could be read as a surrender to a binary opposition, which he was against. Tschumi's aim was precisely to question the relationship between use, form and social values by introducing culture, instead of nature, in a park, but not to give primacy to culture, but rather to

[115] Ibid. 75

"dissociate" the parts.[116] The follies were thus supposed to provide a "multireferential anchoring for things or people" and challenge the conventions of urban parks, of cultural buildings and of the function of buildings in general.[117] All these aims for an architecture of both-and, and the aims of producing architecture without the traditional rules of composition, hierarchy and order, to displace the traditional opposition between program and architecture, seem only to point to the endless possibilities of meaning that is given to works of architecture. For Tschumi, deconstructing architecture involved, "dismantling its conventions, using concepts derived both from architecture and from elsewhere – from cinema, literary criticism and other disciplines."[118] The big bad wolf in the project was presence, which Tschumi describes as "the idea of a meaning immanent in architectural structures and forms that directs its signifying capacities." In other words, it was an attack on the belief that meaning existed in the architectural objects. He was against symbolism, revivalism, and the emergence of post-modern architecture, with what he regarded as its nostalgic pursuit of coherence. Rather, the aim was "to dismantle meaning, showing that it is never transparent, but socially produced"[119], always open, continuously changing. Consequently, La Villette had an architecture that meant nothing and everything because of its infinity of interpretations. The task of the architect was thus to provide this infinity. How this works in detail in Eisenman's projects will be discussed in chapter three, but now we must return to the core theme of this chapter, which is Eisenman's understanding of the ontology of architectural works.

### 1.9 "In order to be, it must always resist being"

As discussed above, during the late 1970s and 1980s, Eisenman was thoroughly influenced by Deconstructivist thinking. This resulted in a reluctance to consider any definition of architecture since it would be a definition of a center, which Eisenman could not accept. The critique of the metaphysics of presence, which was central in deconstruction, was a critique of any definite ontology because it provided presence for architecture. Moreover, one of the problems in describing Eisenman's position throughout the 1980s is both the lack of clarity, contradictions and ambiguities in his writings, and the pursuit of these same contradictions and ambiguities inherent in both Derrida's and Eisenman's oppositional and deconstructivist

[116] Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and disjunction* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994). 177
[117] Ibid. 180
[118] Ibid. 199
[119] Ibid. 199

attitudes. The lack of clarity was supposed to open the writings to multiple interpretations in which the contradictions, ambiguities and paradoxes could be exposed and thus show how meaning was constructed in an arbitrary free play.[120] The strategy that Eisenman employed was thus to continue to make ambiguous and contradictory projects where the displacement, disruption and destabilization of conventions or meanings were applied to architecture. The aim was not to show that such conventions and meanings did not matter for the existence of architecture, but rather to make the point that they are both inevitable and arbitrary.

These inherent contradictions in architecture provided Eisenman with the groundwork for architectural deconstruction where form and content were constantly changing, intertwined and always negotiable. He spent the 1960s trying to get rid of symbolic and representational meaning by constructing a universal formal logic. This logic was supposed to govern all architectural production and secure autonomy, but it denied ambiguity and provided too stable a definition of architecture. Since formal logic was what architecture was all about, it gave architecture a stable meaning, which Eisenman could not accept. He had to change his tactics in order to overcome meaning once again. Jeffrey Kipnis, both a critic and collaborator, has described Eisenman's take on meaning:

> For meaning is definitely there, in the architectural conventions and official presuppositions with which all architects work and design. The meaning of architectural conventions and assumptions is however forgotten precisely because in practice it is taken for granted. The stake in Eisenman's work seems to be the following: to retrieve this forgotten meaning and reawaken the process of signification in architecture. Obviously in order to pursue such an ambitious plan, Eisenman has to thematize not only the syntax and grammar of architecture but also the process through which these become active meaning generators. To go through with syntax and grammar thematization, Eisenman destabilizes the meaning of architectural conventions by collapsing the gap between signifiers and signifieds to an absolute minimum.[121]

The use of the linguistic analogies with syntax and grammar, which for Eisenman provided a logic of form free of meaning in his early works, could now become "generators of meaning." This meant that by putting architectural elements together in certain ways, one could transcend function and meaning and thus make "architecture." For instance, Eisenman stated

[120] Leach, *Rethinking Architecture,* 300, and Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. 50
[121] Jeffrey Kipnis, "Introduction: Written into the Void," in *Written into the Void: Selected writings 1990-2004*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven Yale University Press, 2007).xix

that: “a door is not an abstraction; it is not the sign of a door; it is not a piece of sculpture, nor is it architecture; it is merely a door. Architecture involves transforming a door into something beyond its capacity to be functional.”[122] For Eisenman, meaning derived from the conventions of architecture and these conventions was in turn derived from the ways in which architecture symbolized its function. So, the destabilizing of meaning was not necessarily a way to get rid of function, “but rather to suggest that architecture may function without necessarily symbolizing that function.”[123] Architecture thus became a self-reflexive or self-critical practice in which the relationship between form and function, form and meaning or the sign and signified was constantly open to revision. It was based on the view that architectural elements were simultaneously signifying and signified, or both a material thing and the representation of that thing. For Eisenman, architecture was thus always meaningful, and the meaning was dependent on previously defined conventions. These conventions apparently changed over time and did not secure stability. A definition of architecture would thus be an impossibility because it provided stability to something which was always changing. In the next two chapters this understanding of meaning will be discussed in detail in order to understand how it was specifically determined in Eisenman’s work.

At this point, one could say that in the endless search for meaning, Eisenman’s architecture was not about meaning but endlessness. To say that it is about something at all is probably to say that “the search for essence and autonomy was none other than the search for ultimate center and truth, and therefore contradictory to the effort to dislocate architecture from its metaphysics of center.”[124] The impact of Deconstructivism on Eisenman’s thinking resulted in the belief that there could be no certain answer to where architecture exists. Consequently, for Eisenman, the answers to ontological dilemmas came to be always open to revision. This made him make the claim that: “so, for architecture to be, it must resist what it must in fact do. In order to be, it must always resist being.”[125]

### 1.10 Mr. In-between

Following the completion of the Wexner Center for the arts in Columbus, Ohio, there was a portrait interview with Eisenman in the New York magazine titled *Mr. In-between,*

[122] Peter Eisenman, "Site: The Meaning of Place in Art and Architecture," *Design Quarterly*, no. 122 (1983).
[123] Peter Eisenman, "Post/El Cards: A Reply to Jacques Derrida," *Assemblage*, no. 12 (1990), https://doi.org/10.2307/3171114, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3171114. 17
[124] Peter Eisenman, "Misreading Eisenman," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987/2004).221. Also published in Log
[125] Ibid. 203

*Deconstruction with Peter Eisenman.* In the interview Eisenman described his work as an investigation into the "realities of architecture."[126] The use of the plural form may suggest a continuation of the reluctance to ascribe one single ontology for architecture, but rather that there could be "entire new modes of existence." This position was consistent through the 1990s and even if he employed new ways of describing the presence of architecture, this pertained to a denial of a stable ontology of architecture. Eisenman has explained the work of an architect as "The intent to define the act of architecture as the dislocation and consequent reconstitution of an ever-accruing metaphysics of architecture." The design process was, as I have described, more about breaking down the conventions and assumptions regarding the existence of architecture than to say something definite. The goal for architecture was for Eisenman to reach "a level of communication that goes beyond the mere fact of their existence."[127] All these statements pertained to the architectural process, and it is tempting to assume that Eisenman defined architecture simply as the work of architects. This means that architecture had its existence in the mind of human beings and that the concepts of architecture simply existed in the mind of the architect, but this would be to give in to the "metaphysics of presence."

Alternatively, Eisenman has described architecture as existing "in-between" the physical building and the mental representation of that building. It is hard to see how this "in-between" could differ from an ontological expansion into a Popperian and Fregean third world. The Casa Girasole by Luigi Moretti was, for instance, described by Eisenman as a canonical building because of its *hybrid condition* of having both abstraction and the literal form of figurative representation.[128] The house was defined as a canonical piece of architecture because of "the breakdown of a meaningful organization of a single narrative," and the architecture was neither physical nor mental but existing in the in-between. Similarly, in Eisenman's project based on Romeo and Juliet in Verona, described in *Moving Arrows, Eros and other Errors,* he relied on "the two conditions – the "fictional" and the "real" – this architecture denied origin and closure in both fiction (which is seen to have no origin or end in reality) and reality (which has no origin or end in fiction.)"[129] Eisenman also wrote in the

[126] John Taylor, "Mr. In-Between, Deconstructing with Peter Eisenman," *New York Magazine*, 1988. 48
[127] Peter Eisenman, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential sign," *Log*, no. 30 (2014). 142. Originally published in *Oppositions* 15/16, in 1980.
[128] The essay on Casa girasole in: Peter Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008). 27
[129] Peter Eisenman and Association Architectural, *Moving arrows, eros and other errors : an architecture of absence*, vol. 3, Box, (London: AA Publ., 1986). Also published in: K. Michael Hays, *Architecture theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998). 580

foreword to *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* by Elizabeth Grosz that "The in-between in architectural space is not a literal perceptual or audible sensation, but an affective somatic response that is felt by the body in space. This feeling is not one arising from fact, but rather from the virtual possibility of architectural space."[130] The in-between was presented as a "place" that could be a sort of abstract realm with causal force on both the real building and our mental understanding, and as such mediates both. In later years Eisenman described a sort of force, a supposed "striving or the will to perform or manifest architecture's autonomy," which is a "continuous unfolding of possible being, wrested from any preference for the functioning of the sign."[131] This process precisely describes the need for a critical force which goes beyond the reduction of culturally sedimented meaning to the individual and the first perceptual stimulus.

The in-between could also be just a metaphor for the dialectical relationship between buildings and humans, as in the famous statement by Winston Churchill, "we shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us,"[132] but this could easily become an argument for a spirit of the time, a similar suprahuman force governing architecture. The question is thus what or who gives legitimacy to architecture? As Eisenman suggests, if architecture is defined by how it engages with the conventions of architecture, or the conventions of meaning in architecture, then what or who establishes this meaning? This position arguably requires elaboration, especially on how Eisenman defines meaning. It needs to be clarified if someone, for instance the community of architects, have defining capabilities, or if Eisenman relies on some abstract force to establish meanings. This may be a force which is more vaguely described as "culture," or "discipline," which hints at something over and above the individual human beings belonging to this culture or discipline. The problem is addressed in the fourth chapter.

### 1.11 Self-referential architecture

As I have discussed in the previous paragraphs, there is no easy way to determine the ontological assumptions Eisenman had to make in order to sustain his position after he endorsed Deconstruction. Nevertheless, some justification for architecture must be provided if his theories are to be taken seriously. The views of the philosopher of history Leon Goldstein can illustrate the problem. The main argument in Goldstein's book, *Historical Knowing* from

[130] Eisenman Introduction to Grosz, Architecture from the outside, p. xiii
[131] Eisenman, "Autonomy and the Will to the Critical."
[132] Speech to the parliament in 1943.

1976, is that the historical past is something other than the real past.[133] The claim rested on the argument that since historians do not observe past events directly, they cannot be dealing with the real past. Historians rather *constitute* or construct the historical past, and one does not consider the historical past as true because it corresponds with the events that happened in the real past. Rather, in his view a work of history attains its legitimacy because of an internal coherence.[134] This means that: "the historian reports what he has reason to believe at the conclusion of an inquiry which is intellectual only and in no way historical."[135] Goldstein thus endorsed anti-realism about the past since he assumed it was impossible to reconcile the ways in which historical knowledge is produced with the real facts of the past, and consequently he gave primacy to the process of knowing rather than to a reality independent of this process.[136] The real past was assumed to be irrelevant for the discussion about the nature of historical knowledge that Goldstein was conducting. Since there was no "epistemic way" to reach real objects in the past, one had to rely on the internal framework of knowing, which in turn resulted in denying the historians access to the real past altogether.[137]

If there was no such thing as the real past for historians to know and the process of knowing had primacy, this means that history had to be justified solely by an agreement among historians, who decide about the correct procedure to generate historical knowing. Historical knowing was an activity performed by historians, and this "way of knowing" was equated by Goldstein with historical knowledge. For new discoveries in history to be true, it was simply enough that they were accepted by the community of historians. For Goldstein, it was the agreed-upon methodology and "the character of the discipline, rather than the experience of those who practice it understood subjectively or psychologically, that must be dealt with if we are to expect or understand what it is about an acceptable historical reconstruction that makes it acceptable."[138] The continuous process and work of the historical discipline as a whole through time will, according to Goldstein, determine the success or failure of historical facts.

Eisenman faced similar problems as Goldstein and the former's distinction between architecture and building resembles the latter's distinction between the historical past and the

[133] Leon Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (Austin: University of Texas press, 1976). xiii
[134] Branko Mitrović, *Materialist philosophy of history : a realist antidote to postmodernism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020). 33
[135] Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* xiii
[136] Leon Goldstein, "History and the Primacy of Knowing," *History and Theory* 16, no. 4 (1977). 30
[137] Ibid. 40
[138] Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* 213

real past. The comparison becomes especially useful in the disciplinary justifications both had to make. Goldstein emphasized that history was constructed collectively by the historical discipline and was not "relative to the subjectivity of historians." He thus denied that each historian could make an individual claim to historical knowledge, rather, the claim had to be accepted by the community of historians.[139] The historical methods and the primacy of this process of historical "knowing" in Goldstein's account are comparable to Eisenman's emphasis on the architectural process. However, in Eisenman's early works, architecture was developed through what he described as a process of the logic of form justified by platonic immaterial rules and not by the workings of the discipline of architecture. But in his later works, Eisenman abandoned these rules and relied on a process which constituted a continuous critique of the conventions, meanings and norms given through the discipline.[140] Architecture was thus considered a critical activity with an "inherent resistance to the status quo," and it began with a process of "becoming unmotivated of the sign."[141] The sign in architecture was its historically and culturally sedimented meaning and this process of "unmotivating" lead to a dynamic generative process of constant difference which constituted architecture's autonomy. The process was based on criticality, and according to Eisenman, "this autonomy is neither formal nor semiotic per se; rather, it opens the internal processes of architecture to their own internal possibilities. It is the manifestation of these processes that will constitute the critical."[142] Autonomy and its necessary critical component was thus continually opening the discourse of architecture, making it into an everchanging project of introspection. The survival of the discipline was thus secured by a continuous commentary on the conventions and meanings of architecture. This had to rely on a disciplinary justification because the critical project, which for Eisenman defined architecture, was based on the developments of a "discursive event that is architecture."[143] Consequently, the reliance on the process and the inherent disciplinary conventions must ensure that the work of architecture was justified through an acceptance by the discipline. How this process works will be shown in chapter 4 when we come to discuss the role of the avant-garde in Eisenman's theorizing.

Following the initial ontological discussion, the question which remains to be answered is whether the work of architecture in Eisenman's later theories is dependent or

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[139] Ibid. 40

[140] Ingeborg Rocker, "Discipline.Autonomy" in Vladan Djokić and Petar Bojanić, *Peter Eisenman : In Dialogue with Architects and Philosophers*, vol. nr.2, Architecture, (Italia: Mimesis International, 2017). 99

[141] Eisenman, "Autonomy and the Will to the Critical." 90

[142] Ibid, 91

[143] Eisenman, "Post/El Cards: A Reply to Jacques Derrida." 16

independent of the mind of human beings. Eisenman's emphasis on the distinction between architecture and building and the belief in a continuous change warranted by the discipline might suggest that the answer must be dependent on the human mind. Just like Goldstein's definition of history as a collective effort, Eisenman is in his reliance on the process, not as the design of shapes in space but as the giving of meaning or the critique of meaning, defining architecture to be inherently intellectual. Architecture is for Eisenman a kind of "attitude", "discursive event" or simply the "discipline."[144] This made architecture into a self-critical project, where the goal was not to make anything better for human beings, but rather to do a kind of activity which had value in itself.[145] If architecture is what architects do, this raises several questions regarding the discipline, and who is accepted as the members of the discipline. Especially relevant questions pertain to the meaning-giving process, and who is allowed to define the "right" way architecture means, or the "right" way meaning is to be criticized. In the fourth chapter the discipline and the avant-garde in architecture are discussed as potential meaning-givers and subsequently the definers of architectural works. This resembles Popper's definition of a world 3 object, which is an object that is a product of the human mind. At the same time, this world three object is separated from the very same mind, having an existence in an abstract immaterial realm, independent of both the material first world and the mental second world. This means that even if it is difficult to know if Eisenman believed that architectural works existed entirely in an abstract immaterial realm, he still relied on this realm and his theoretical position required this postulation. Early in his career, he assumed that architectural works relied on a platonic and universal logic of form, whereas later, as we shall see in chapter 4, he relied on the avant-garde as the defining power giving meaning to these works.

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is discuss the problems, assumptions, and possibilities in Eisenman's writings through the lens of basic ontological questions. There is arguably no easy definition of his position, and as has been apparent in this chapter there is a possibility that he thinks architecture exists in all the three ontological realms at once, giving primacy to none. The ontological assumptions in his theorizing certainly changed through time. This discussion thus presents a framework for the further analysis of Eisenman's theories and could provide a basis for a discussion of the specific ways Eisenman treats the

[144] Peter Eisenman, "Discipline. Autonomy", in Djokić and Bojanić, *Peter Eisenman : In Dialogue with Architects and Philosophers*, nr.2.
[145] ibid. 237

intellectual aspects of architecture, especially meaning, as well as the question about who attributes this meaning to architecture.

## Chapter 2

## ARCHITECTURAL MEANING

### 2.1 The Unavoidable Meaning of Architecture

In a quote that Peter Eisenman attributes to Jacques Derrida, Derrida says that "architecture cannot be without meaning."[1] For Eisenman, who has spent his entire career discussing meaning in architecture, this quote created what he called a challenge and a problem. This problem rested on a premise that Eisenman attributes to Vitruvius: "a wall in architecture is not merely holding something up, it also symbolizes that act of holding up."[2] According to Eisenman, the term *firmitas* in Vitruvius was precisely an exposition of this premise. For Eisenman, the important aspect of Vitruvius' assertion was that a wall should not just stand up, it should also look like it stands up. This meant that in architecture there was an unbreakable relationship between iconicity (the "look like") and instrumentality (that it "stands up"), or between what a thing is and what it means.[3] This was in turn the reason why architecture had to be deconstructed:

> Because in order to "deconstruct" the meaning of architecture, one must attempt to separate what in fact cannot be separated. Thus, unlike any other discourse, architecture both resists and requires the deconstructive impulse. The resistance alone should be of interest to deconstructive thought.[4]

So, the challenge and the problem for Eisenman involves what he regards as the unavoidable meaning of architecture. As the example above suggests, for Eisenman, works of architecture are attributed meaning according to what they do or how they function, but this understanding of meaning is not necessarily what he had in mind.

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[1] Peter Eisenman et al., "Presentness and the "Being-Only-Once" of Architecture," in *Deconstruction Is/In America*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp, A New Sense of the Political (NYU Press, 1995). 135

[2] Ibid. Eisenman does not cite Vitruvius in his essay, and I have not managed to find that this is explicitly stated by Vitruvius.

[3] Eisenman's claim was that one should make a critique of what he deemed was to be the "natural" conditions of architecture: "The very conditions that bring about this idea of an *a priori* destiny or a thought to be naturalness of architecture, and thus what makes architecture problematic, lie initially in the fact that architecture is alone of all the discourses in its particular linking of its iconicity and its instrumentality, its meaning with its objecthood." In: Eisenman et al., "Presentness and the "Being-Only-Once" of Architecture." 135

[4] Ibid. 136

In order to understand Eisenman's position, it is therefore necessary to examine what he means by meanings. A complicating factor in the discussion of meaning in Eisenman's work is that he has used words like signification, meaning, representation, symbolism, reference, or message in relation to "meaning." Accordingly, in the analysis of works of architecture or works of art in general, meaning is an especially complex concept because there are several ways one could understand the word "meaning" in relation to architecture. For instance, when someone uses the phrase "the meaning of architecture," is it identical to the "architect's intention," does it pertain to the original meaning attributed to an architectural work in its contemporary cultural context, or is it the understanding and reception of a contemporary audience? This further raises the question of whether meaning is a property that is somehow intrinsic to architectural works or whether it is ascribed by something or someone else?

The dilemma relates to the relationship between form and meaning, and this dilemma has no straightforward definition. As Stefano Corbo has described it: "form is, for Eisenman, a field of possibilities, in which the hierarchy of meaning among its constitutive elements is totally dissolved."[5] Since Eisenman's position is often ambiguous and open to change, it is difficult to arrive at a precise definition of Eisenman's for the term "meaning", but it is nevertheless possible to trace some of the consistencies and discuss the ambiguities that occur within his works.

For Eisenman, the meaning of architecture is determined by its role within a conventional system of symbols. For instance, an architectural element like a column symbolizes its load bearing capacity. The idea is not only that a specific column means "load-bearing" in this instance, but that it has meaning which could be compared with words in a language. These initial remarks suggest that Eisenman understands meanings as the conventional ways architectural elements both do what they do, how they function, and consequently how these elements symbolize this capacity. However, what Eisenman points at is that these conventions are not only open to change, but necessarily change, and that the architect should in some way refer to this process. An example that Eisenman uses is what he presents as one of Le Corbusier's definitions of architecture: "Le Corbusier suggested that when a window is too large or too small for a room—that is, when it is not as it is expected to be—it signifies the presence of architecture."[6] So, what Eisenman tries to do is not only to

[5] Stefano Corbo, *From Formalism to Weak Form: The Architecture and Philosophy of Peter Eisenman* (Routledge Ltd, 2016). 2

[6] Peter Eisenman and Matt Roman, *Palladio virtuel* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2015). 11

make architectural meaning apparent, but also to challenge the ways architectural works mean, and thus reach an understanding of what architecture is.

Throughout his career, Eisenman has worked against what he calls "meaning," understood as a convention that relates an architectural work to something outside of itself. For example, a building represents, symbolizes, expresses, or signifies something other than itself. Eisenman was thus working against a certain kind of metaphorical meaning, the attribution of a specific meaning to a specific work or element of architecture. At the same time, as suggested in the opening of this chapter, he has acknowledged that meaning is essential for architecture. But this is not always explicitly stated, and Eisenman uses the term "meaning" to refer to different ways in which architectural works acquire content. This entails the question of what kind of *meaning* Eisenman is willing to accept, and what kind of basic assumptions and premises must be stated, or at least implied, to maintain a plausible and applicable theory of meaning. Therefore, in this chapter I will try to determine if Eisenman subscribes to a theory of meaning and how this theory could be understood in his work. This requires a discussion of both some of his predecessors as well as other solutions to the problem of meaning in general.

In the first chapter, I discussed Eisenman's early works more thoroughly since the questions of ontology were more explicit early in his career. And since the questions of meaning become more important in his later works, I give special attention to this period in the following chapter. In his early works, he assumed that there was some universal basis for architecture, like generic form or deep structure, whereas in his later works he abandoned this position. The influence of French post-structuralist thinkers, especially Derrida, made Eisenman question any universal basis for architecture. This placed the question of how architectural works were attributed meaning as the core concern for Eisenman. His assumptions about the definition of architectural objects became more and more tied to how these objects attain meaning.

### 2.2 Architecture as language

As established in the first chapter, for Eisenman architecture is about ideas. Meaning is therefore central in his theoretical project. The distinction between physical objects, buildings, and architectural works, which Eisenman has defined as the distinction between the

conceptually "real architecture" and the physical "real building," [7] has forced him to emphasize content or ideas over form, or more precisely how the relationship between form and content works. Eisenman has thus been giving primacy to the reading, interpretation, and understanding of buildings, rather than to a direct perception or experience of the same buildings. This reading and interpretation is arguably connected to the search for meaning, and for Eisenman, this was not a search for a true external meaning, that architecture metaphorically represents or means something other than itself, but rather to show the problems in how architecture could mean.

One of the fundamental assumptions that Eisenman makes is that architecture is thought of as a representational discourse.[8] This means that: "architects from Vitruvius to Alberti to Palladio inscribed into the discipline the concept that architecture, in addition to its being, must look and represent being."[9] Even if this was not explicitly formulated in Eisenman's writings before the mid-1970s, he had to address meaning in order to give primacy to form, which was the most important aspect for the success of an architectural work. However, form was not necessarily thought of as just the arrangement of shapes in space. In the dissertation *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, Eisenman asserted that any creative act is the communication of an idea through a means of expression.[10] So, Eisenman's initial assumption was that form contributed to the communication of an idea in an architectural work. This enabled him to treat architecture as a language.

The rise of a semiotic trend in architecture in the 1960s and 1970s has been described as a response to the structuralism of the 1950s as well as a way out of the "crisis of legitimacy of modern architecture."[11] As Andre Loeckx and Hilde Heynen put it in their description of this period, buildings were neither just physical entities where form followed function, nor autonomous meaning-free pieces of art, but artifacts with an inevitable ability to produce or evoke meaning.[12] Since architecture was treated as a non-verbal language of signs where the

[7] Peter Eisenman, "From Object to Relationship II: Casa Giuliani Frigerio: Giuseppe Terragni Casa Del Fascio," *Perspecta* 13/14 (1971).
[8] Eisenman and Roman, *Palladio virtuel*. 19
[9] Ibid.
[10] Eisenman wrote that: "Architecture, as a means of expression work can call upon several elements to contribute to the architectural equation, which can be thought of as: concept or intent; function; structure; technics; form." Peter Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 1963/2006). 25
[11] This is attributed to John Summerson who in his "The Case for a Modern Theory of Architecture" in 1957 gave this diagnosis on architectural theory. In: Sebastiaan Loosen, Rajesh Heynickx, and Hilde Heynen, *The Figure of Knowledge : Conditioning Architectural Theory, 1960s - 1990s* (Leuven University Press, 2020). 31
[12] Ibid. 32

meanings rested on the relationships between these signs, it was comparable with language. This comparison meant that theories of architecture could be influenced by theories of language and linguistics. Geoffrey Broadbent, for instance, relied on the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's tripartite semiotics of icon, symbol, and index to construct a design method.[13] Later, Charles Jencks emphasized metaphor and meaning in his advocacy of postmodern architecture. For him. architecture worked as a sign which inevitably acquired meaning through codes and conventions, but this sign was always open for manipulation and negotiation.[14] Jencks made the point that in the tripartite relationship between language, thought and reality, there was always a back and forth. All the elements affected each other and created complex and often paradoxical ways of producing meaning. Architecture was thus praised for its possibilities of multiple interpretations of symbolic, metaphoric, and iconic content. Views like Jencks' exercised major influence on postmodern architecture and parallel Eisenman's interest in the analogies between language and architecture. But, even if Eisenman's approach was related to Jencks, it started out differently.

So, the point was that architectural works communicated something, and that a perceiver was interpreting this communication. However, Eisenman's intention was not to show that architectural works communicate something random, but to show that these works communicate their own essential nature. The aim of his dissertation was to describe "a language that will communicate the nature of the formal essence of any architecture." [15] This meant that the point was to make an architecture that communicated itself, and the problem was thus to find the right means of expression so that any viewer of a work of architecture could find "meaning received through an interpretation of the inherent qualities in the physical object itself and not representation."[16] For Eisenman, contrary to Jencks, architecture was not composed of elements that conveyed meaning of something else the way words in a language do. Rather, the elements of architecture said something about architecture's own being and its own process of becoming.

In order to clarify this distinction between words and architecture, one should consider a short description of a common explanation of the meaning of words. This is of course not an

[13] Geoffrey Broadbent, Charles Jencks, and Richard Bunt, *Signs, symbols and architecture* (Chichester: Wiley, 1980).
[14] Charles Jencks, 1969, Meaning in Architecture, Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture* (London: Barrie & Rockliff The Cresset Press, 1969).
[15] Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*. 19
[16] Peter Eisenman, "Towards an understanding of form in Architecture," in Peter Eisenman, *Eisenman inside out : selected writings, 1963-1988,* Theoretical perspectives in architectural history and criticism, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004). 13

exhaustive explanation and is merely used to understand the "meaning" that Eisenman pointed at. For instance, the word "tree" gets its meaning since it expresses the concept of a tree, which is not the same as the word, but the content of a thought. This content is defined as a set of classificatory criteria which define the objects we know as trees. We know that something is a tree because it satisfies the criteria of being a tree.[17] So, the word "tree" acquires its meaning by convention and social agreement. We simply relate the word "tree", which initially could mean anything, to the concept (thought content) of tree. The question is how this translates to architecture and if one is to understand a work or an element of architecture as a word. For instance, if one is to think of a column as a word, it could be a conventional expression of a concept that is not a column, for instance an upright human body. The crucial point for Eisenman, however, is that a column works both like a word and a concept at the same time. A column expresses something, but it differs from a word in that it expresses itself. This is because a column both carries a beam, an arch, or a slab, and refers to this very same activity. A column is simply a column, and a symbol of a column. In this sense the meaning of a column could be defined by how it functions, but as we shall see, this is not what Eisenman was after. For him, the way in which a building element or a whole building attains meaning was the central problem. The question thus becomes what warrants and defines this meaning, and why the self-referential character which Eisenman calls its "inherent qualities" was more important than the symbolic reference a column makes to something else. Later, Eisenman called this reference an "already motivated condition of the sign," which he deemed to be a unique condition of architecture.[18]

Since these inherent meanings were deemed to be more essential for architecture, there was a difference in the hierarchy of meaning, and the question is whether this difference was about the nature of meaning or if it was about something else. Nevertheless, what Eisenman did was to replace one type of meaning with another. He distinguished between a conventional meaning and a non-conventional meaning. This is apparent in his own description of one of his early houses, his *Cardboard Architecture,* which were developed from the analytical work done in his dissertation.

> So, I achieved what I wanted to achieve, which was to lessen the difference between the built form and the model. I was always trying to say "built model" as the conceptual reality of

[17] See Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, *Concepts : core readings* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999). 3-82, especially 3-26

[18] Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, vol. 1 (New York: Universe Publishing, 1999). 30

> architecture. So, when you see these houses and you visit them you realize that they were concerned not with meaning in the social sense of the word or the cultural sense, but in the architectural meaning.[19]

Here. Eisenman acknowledged that meaning was and is fundamental, and in his view, one needed to make a distinction between a non-conventional architectural meaning and a conventional cultural meaning.

### 2.3 Generic and Specific Form

The distinction between architectural meaning and social or cultural meaning resembles two ways in which one could understand the nature of meaning. Meaning could either be understood as mental content and exists in the mind of human beings, or it could exists independently of these mental states. In this latter view one must assume that meanings are only reflected in the minds of human beings but have an existence elsewhere. This is related to the discussions in the first chapter about the existence of architecture as a Popperian third world object. As we shall see, architectural meaning could be defined similarly, and for Eisenman the task was to understand how an architect could make these architectural meanings apparent in a work of architecture.

In "Notes on Conceptual Architecture: Towards a Definition," Eisenman mentioned the difficulty and importance for artists and architects to find the means of expressing a conceptual "idea" through an artwork and argued that "form" was supposed to express this idea.[20] As mentioned above, the "formal" was thus not just taken as the shape of a building, something directly perceived, but as something that requires an interpretation. This means that primacy was given to the formal, but only as the expression of an underlying idea, which could be reflected in the mind of a human being. As discussed, this idea was not simply any meaning that could be interpreted from a building. The point was to single out the architectural meaning.

As discussed in the first chapter, Eisenman's aim was to understand rather than merely perceive architecture. Primacy was thus given to the "conceptual understanding" since perception was too dependent on the subject and thus less open to what he called formal

[19] Peter Eisenman in an interview with Iman Ansari, in: Iman Ansari, "Interview: Peter Eisenman," *Architectural Review* (2013).

[20] Peter Eisenman, "Notes on Conceptual Architecture: Towards a Definition," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971/2004). First published in: *Design Quarterly*, no. 78/79 (1970): 1–5. Walker art center.

universals.[21] This was grounded in what he regarded as an absolute rather than a relative basis. This was supposed to be apparent in an architectural work and was something the architect needed to consider in the design of a building. However, Eisenman's subdivisions of terms and elusive explanations make his line of reasoning difficult to follow.

Eisenman's initial move was to divide form into two categories, specific and generic. The generic form provided the basis for the development of an architectural work, and the specific form was the perceivable shape of the actual building. More precisely, the "relative" specific form got its character by its association and reference to the "absolute" generic form. For instance, a building with the shape of a cube was developed in accordance with an inevitable centroidal force which determined the organization of the plan. But a work of architecture did not just evolve out of a sort of platonic generic form. Specific form was also developed out of something else: "all specific form in architecture is conceived initially from a critique of two of the elements, intent and function."[22] Intent was defined as a "primary conception of a thing. For example, before we can build a "temple" we must have had an idea or concept "temple."[23] Here, Eisenman wanted to distinguish between the concept that he called "intent" and function. He further acknowledged that "owing to our experiential and historical associations it is difficult to isolate the function of a "temple" from the concept "temple," or from the specific form we associate with temple,"[24] but he made clear that we must always have the concept of a temple before one could attribute function to it. This meant that function and intent were separated, but it is not clear what Eisenman thought the "primary conception of a thing" is. The same can be said of how the relationship between generic and specific forms is established.

There are indications that Eisenman saw specific form as a reflection of the cultural environment, and that the "primary conception of a thing," or "intent," could be thought of as generated by culture. As an example, Eisenman mentioned that the specific form of a Gothic cathedral was dependent on its impact on the beholder. This would suggest that the meaning and symbols change for each generation, which makes them unfit as a basis for the rational

[21] Eisenman distinguished between the sensual and universal aspects, where the latter were closely tied to the conceptual: "In general, the conceptual aspect is defined by an intention to shift the primary focus from the sensual aspects of objects to the universal aspects of objects. For this conceptual aspect to be primary, it must be made intentional, that is, the result of an *a priori* design intention, and further it must be accessible through the physical fact – whether the primary intention is semantic (concerned with meaning) or syntactic (concerned with formal universals)." in Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*. 23

[22] Ibid. 39

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

argument which Eisenman was proposing in his dissertation. These culturally defined meanings was also complicated by Eisenman's concept of "specific forms," which were initially derived from an "utilitarian function" to give "symbolic meaning." An example is the use of a streamlined form to handle stress from wind and air, which in turn becomes a "symbolic evocation of twentieth century attitudes and sensibility."[25] Eisenman further explained how the response to a "utilitarian" function was different from the response to a "symbolic" function. For a church, on the one hand, the utilitarian function, a gathering-place-for-large-groups of people, suggested that the architectural response could be a large place with a roof. On the other hand, the symbolic function, a focal point of the worship of the community, made this particular roof different. A dome could, for instance, be the response to this symbolic function. The proposed specific form answered thus both the symbolic and the utilitarian function, but since the specific form of a particular church had a temporal and subjective nature, it only responded to the perceptive character of the dome. Eisenman was interested in the responses to what he thought of as the *concept* of the dome, which were of a "generic nature," and in this case it was the *centroidal* workings and character of the dome, as opposed to the linear, which provided the basis for the *concept*.[26] In other words, he was interested in the "architectural meaning", which is not to be identified as the cultural or symbolic meaning of a dome. A question which remains unanswered is what the nature of this difference is, which has consequences for the question of what or who defines the architecturally relevant meaning.

In *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, Eisenman concluded that the specific form of a building was established by considering the utilitarian function and the character of the site, which the internal workings of the generic forms could be tested against. The logic which he argued for could only be based on generic form, but as Eisenman emphasized, "the end product can only be a synthesis of form with the other elements of the architectural equation."[27] So, a rectangular building with columns and slabs has a linear generic form which must "clearly express its generic derivation as a linear configuration." Therefore, the vertical circulation in a slab block would be a logical basis for its evolution and had to correlate with generic form.

[25] Ibid. 43
[26] Ibid. 45
[27] Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*. 53

> A mere grafting of a lift tower only amounts to a picturesque manifestation of its utilitarian function. If instead a specific form was evolved for this vertical movement that satisfied not only its utilitarian function but also its "symbolic" function as a transition from ground level to any raised level and was furthermore expressive of the generic quality of linear form, then it would be presenting the required synthesis.[28]

For the linear slab block, Eisenman then proposed a cascading continuous movement between floors as this synthesis. The giving of form in this instance was thus more than the making of shapes, which just satisfied the perceptual aspects. In the previous example, the *conceptual* aspects were satisfied, and they expressed the total order and the clarity of intent and function. "Form is therefore specific, yet at the same time general. It provides architecture, the particular means of expressing intent and accommodating function, and the general means for creating an ordered environment."[29] In *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture,* Eisenman was both against the visual aspects of form and a problem-solving approach where form followed function and context.

Moreover, Eisenman positioned his thesis against iconographical issues and against the Gestalt psychologists' emphasis on the experience of the eye, which was fashionable at the time. He wrote: "Although an analysis of the symbolic content of a building and its meaning may be considered crucial, by their exclusion it will not be necessary to discuss any value-judgements in relation to formal content." [30] Eisenman thus avoided what he deemed to be problems related to subjective interpretations, which included all value judgements, in order to focus on "the logical interaction of formal concepts."[31] These concepts were, as mentioned, considered non-mental and abstract, and thus not tainted by subjective interpretation. When it comes to meaning in architecture, Eisenman was against any iconographical or symbolic meaning because this was deemed to be too subjective since it relied on perception and subsequent interpretation. His aim was to show that "considerations of a logical and objective nature can provide a conceptual, formal basis for any architecture."[32] But interpretation was nevertheless important. So, a question that arises is what kind of interpretation Eisenman allows. Since there obviously needs to be some kind of

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid, 55
[30] Eisenman's intention was to provide a "more restrictive definition of formal considerations" than the proponents of gestalt psychology, and "excise as far as possible iconographical and perceptual references." See: Ibid.15
[31] Ibid. 17
[32] Ibid. 19

activity that makes the inherent qualities apparent from what can actually be seen, there seems to be a need for a specific kind of interpretation. This must, however, be a non-subjective interpretation to retain the universality that Eisenman wanted. This did not necessarily mean that an architectural work was purely dependent on a universal basis, but that Eisenman wanted to establish this basis and see how it worked together with the specific, contingent, and shifting requirements.[33]

### 2.4 The Abstract Implied Meanings

As discussed in the first chapter, the avoidance of any subjective interpretation of form had to be an endorsement of a conceptual extra-human quality, existing independently like a Platonic form and instantiated in works of architecture. Eisenman thus employed "geometric solids as absolute points of reference" and "by means of this reference, it will seek to clarify the relationship of form to any architecture."[34] This meant that "in architectural situations where a multiplicity of programmatic requirements leads to a need for a more complex order, it is even more essential for there to be some reference to a geometric absolute."[35] This "reference" provided the basis for a conceptually understood "implied meaning", which Eisenman tried to investigate in his early houses.[36]

So, the physical form of a building got its meaning from the conceptual form, which was defined as the overarching forces governing the specific and physical form of a building. Eisenman tried to deny "the arbitrary, the picturesque and the romantic: the subjective and personal interpretation of order."[37] His aim was to describe the conceptual content that was independent of individual cultural background, previous knowledge and beliefs. Eisenman did not deny content, but he rather replaced or gave primacy to one kind of content over another, or architectural meaning over other kinds of meaning.[38] The important point was that for Eisenman architectural meaning had a special extramental abstract character.

In the first chapter, I discussed the change that occurred in Eisenman's position regarding his assumption about the existence of architectural works. This change, which

[33] Eisenman wrote on the relationship of form to architecture that: "A basic priority must be established in architecture which evolved from the dialectic between relative and absolute ends." Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*. 27
[34] Ibid. 15
[35] Ibid. 87
[36] This is apparent in the description of House 1 in: Peter Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman : Peter Eisenman complete works*, ed. Cynthia Davidson and Stan Allen (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006). 32
[37] Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*.21
[38] Referring to Geoffrey Scott and Henri Focillon, in Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*. 87

occurred in the mid-1970s, also affected his position on meaning. The replacement of one meaning with another just provided another kind of stability, which became difficult for Eisenman to maintain. Consequently, he rejected any tendency to universalize the properties or value of architecture.[39] However, the remarkably consistent position he has maintained throughout his career is to give less importance to the visual perception of architectural works. This is apparent in his reading of historical works of architecture, where the goal was to interpret them as a part of a continuous process of finding the many possibilities of meaning. As Eisenman has pointed out in discussing his analysis of architecture: "Ultimately it is not the buildings, but their readings which are undecidable,"[40] which provided the basis for "an endless cycle of becoming, and as such an idea of infinite displacement." This means that architectural meaning is somehow both extramental and abstract, and open to change. In this sense the architectural meaning is closely related to Karl Popper's third world objects.

During the same period, similar views on meanings were debated by a number of analytic philosophers. It is not certain – in fact, it is unlikely – that Eisenman read these works, but such understanding of meaning was not unusual during the era. Hilary Putnam's *The Meaning of Meaning*, from 1975 and Tyler Burge's *Individualism and the Mental* from 1979, are examples of theories of meaning which relied on an extramental structure which defined the meaning of words, contrary to the belief that the meaning of a word is mental. Putnam asserted that "most traditional philosophers thought of concepts as something mental. Thus, the doctrine that the meaning of a term is a concept carried the implication that meanings are mental entities."[41] Putnam's aim was to argue that these assumptions did not satisfy any notion of meaning, and that "meanings just ain't in the head."[42] Meaning on his account was thus fixed by the community of speakers, but not in the sense of a collection of individual mental states, but rather as a "sociolinguistic state of the collective linguistic body."[43] In other words, the assumption is that there are abstract collective linguistic bodies over and above individuals and their mental states, and these collective bodies have sociolinguistic states that fix meanings. The meaning of words thus rested on a conventional "normal form," which made Putnam conclude that meaning determines the extension of a word by sociolinguistic construction and is independent of the psychological state of the

[39] Peter and Iturbe Eisenman, Elisa, *Lateness*, ed. Sarah Whiting, Point, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). 98
[40] Peter Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008). 24
[41] Hillary Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning," *Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science* 7 (1975). 134
[42] Ibid. 144
[43] Ibid. 146

speaker.[44] This is quite similar to Eisenman's assumptions that architecture has meaning that is changeable, but that it is also outside of any subject's reading of a work of architecture.

Both Putnam and Burge illustrate an anti-materialist tendency in the philosophy of language, and the tendency to question "individualistic assumptions in materialist, as well as Cartesian approaches to the mental," without postulating explicitly a spiritual force.[45] In any case, the meanings they talked about had abstract, immaterial, non-mental existence. So, Eisenman's view of meanings as non-mental and determined by the "sociolinguistic" culture was not unusual at the time. In this context, the desire to deconstruct, displace, or criticize meaning becomes more understandable. For these deconstructions, displacements and critiques to be of importance, one must assume that things and works of architecture have a definite meaning which exists outside of individuals interpreting them. From this one could infer that works of architecture hold a multiplicity of meanings, and that the works are not just blank canvasses to be attributed meanings, but that the meanings are already there. And since there are a multiplicity of meanings, it is impossible for individual human beings to define meanings. All an architect could do is thus criticize *every possible* meaning.

This is apparent in Eisenman's own methods of analysis of historical buildings. But before presenting and discussing Eisenman's own analyses of buildings and works of architecture, it is important to turn here to some of the origins of Eisenman's method, especially and most prominently, Eisenman's mentor Colin Rowe. According to Rosalind Krauss, Rowe was one of the first to favor mental constructs over built reality, which meant that he gave primacy to the interpretation, and consequently the meaning of architecture.[46]

### 2.5 Colin Rowe's Method of Formal Analysis

The emphasis given to an architectural meaning over a social or cultural meaning, and the very idea that there is such a thing, was predominantly a search for the autonomy of architecture. This autonomy was for Eisenman deeply connected to the formal, but not visual characteristics, and had to be analyzed for its hidden structure and ideas.[47] As I have previously indicated, form was thus a means to something else, or said more appropriately,

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[44] Ibid. 196

[45] Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," *Midwest Studies in Philosphy* 4, no. 1 (1979). 113

[46] Rosalind Krauss, "Death of a Hermeneutic Phantom: Materialization of the Sign in the Work of Peter Eisenman," in *Houses of Cards,* ed. Peter Eisenman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[47] This is elaborated by Ingeborg Rocker in a lecture and conversation at the conference "Issues: Concerning the Projects of Peter Eisenman" held at the University of Belgrade in 2013. See: Ingeborg Rocker "Discipline: Autonomy" in *Peter Eisenman: In Dialogue with Architects and Philosophers*, ed. Vladan Djokić and Petar Bojanić (Italia: Mimesis International, 2017) 95-103

form stood for something and was thus inevitably connected with meaning or signification. This required a specific method of analysis, which took form as a starting point. Eisenman was here indebted to Colin Rowe, but as mentioned, also the predominantly German tradition of art-historiography, which came to dominate Anglo-American art-historiography. The aim of the historians belonging to this tradition was to employ a method of art-history, whereby observable form was thought to hold the key to other truths about the artworks. Consequently, by reading or interpreting the form of art or architecture, one could get to the true meanings of these very same works. This method is found in Colin Rowe's writings, and as we shall see later, it is comparable with the method Eisenman used in both his dissertation and in later works. Even if Rowe did not discuss meaning directly, his method of formal analysis had implications that affect the conception of meaning, and it is these implications that are important in this discussion.

The influence Rowe had on Eisenman's work is well documented.[48] Rowe was only briefly at Cambridge, so he did not end up as Eisenman's official doctoral advisor, but he was his mentor and introduced him to important works of architecture and to a method of analyzing them.[49] Since Rowe was a student of Rudolf Wittkower, Eisenman could be seen as both continuing and revising the method of analysis developed at the Warburg institute.[50] Wittkower's approach to meanings of architectural works was based on the analysis of their form. The formal or proportional analysis he employed did not take form itself perceived as such, but rather took form or proportion as a point of departure to discuss and interpret the works of architecture. In the introductory paragraph of *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Wittkower asserted that scholarship of Renaissance architecture was too concerned with its "wordliness," and that:

> At best it is argued that the classical apparatus of forms was used on an equal level for sacred, profane, and domestic building; that the classical forms were adapted for different purposes

[48] Even if this was somewhat questioned by Rem Koolhaas, who commented on the relationship between Eisenman and Rowe: "Peter exaggerated it completely, always suggesting that it was only by traveling with Rowe, and kind of sleeping with Rowe, that being exposed to a complete and relentless overdose that he became who he was. But that is what I saw as the influence of Rowe on Peter: that he had locked up somebody completely in the prison of architecture and thrown away the key." In Robert Somol Rem Koolhaas, "Being O.M.U's Ghostwriter " in *Reckoning with Colin Rowe: Ten Architects Take Position*, ed. Emmanuel Petit (New York: Routledge, 2015). 93

[49] Peter Eisenman, "Not the Last Word: The Intellectual Sheik " *ANY: Architecture New York*, no. 7/8 (1994).

[50] See also the reference to Wittkower in Eisenman, The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture, 28

> without any gradation of meaning.; and that consequently Renaissance architecture, is an architecture of pure form.[51]

Wittkower's aim was to define general principles of architectural proportions through the method of formal analysis. He then used this to make assertions and generalizations on the meaning of these forms. For instance, the centrally planned Renaissance church did not necessarily present a turn to a human-centric perception of the beauty of the pure form, but rather that "the forms of the Renaissance church have symbolic value or, at least, that they are charged with a particular meaning which the pure forms as such do not contain."[52] The arguments proposed in *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* were for Wittkower a way to overcome the idea that the architecture of the Renaissance was based on the senses and the individual taste of the architect. This has been described by Alina Payne as a "conscious intellect-driven will to form aimed at conveying meaning, and hence aimed at the mind rather than the senses."[53] Wittkower thus sought to establish a connection between cultural beliefs, symbolism and meaning on the one hand, and physical form and geometry on the other. For him, architecture in the Renaissance was a mathematical science which revealed "the perfection, omnipotence and goodness of God."[54] Architecture was thus rooted in the totality of the Renaissance conception of the world, which was expressed in mathematical form.

As a student of Wittkower, Colin Rowe questioned but did not fully abandon Wittkower's methods and theories, and the method of formal analysis was still the basis for Rowe. Consequently, Rowe thought that meaning was found in the work of architecture, and that it required interpretation. Whereas Wittkower devoted most of his studies to only Renaissance and Baroque architecture and their meanings, Rowe sought to provide a connection between the Renaissance and Modernism. Thus, the aim of Le Corbusier's architecture was according to Rowe, "to acquire objective significance as symbolizing the process of society," in similar way as Renaissance architecture.[55]

The influence of Rowe on Eisenman is apparent in the use of formal analysis, where the internal workings of form and especially the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in

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[51] Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural principles in the age of humanism*, 4th ed. ed. (London: Academy Editions, 1973). 4
[52] Ibid. 5
[53] Alina Payne, "Rudolf Wittkower adn Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, no. 3 (1994). 325
[54] Wittkower, *Architectural principles in the age of humanism*. 21.
[55] Colin Rowe, "Mathematics of the Ideal villa," in Colin Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays* (Cambridge etc.: MIT Press, 1976). Originally published in *The Architectural Review* (1947)

works of architecture were of importance. In his two essays, "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa" and "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," published respectively in 1947 and 1950 in *The Architectural Review*, Rowe employed a comparative methodology to present the "hidden" meanings of form in the works of architecture.[56] The question is what these hidden meanings were for Rowe, and as we shall see, they could easily be related to Eisenman's "architectural meaning." Both Rowe and Eisenman emphasized that the important feature of an architectural work was its ideas, the implied and underlying structures which could be interpreted by reading the form. Interpretation was thus the key, and even if the goal for Rowe was to separate form from its extrinsic meanings, its morality and truth, and read form as form, the form was still supposed to be intellectually understood.

For instance, in the "Mathematics of the Ideal Villa," Rowe tried to go beyond the formal unlikeness between the works of Andrea Palladio and Le Corbusier and find their analogous similarities, which for Rowe required substantial interpretation. Even if Palladio's Villa Foscari at Malcontenta looked nothing like Le Corbusier's Villa Stein at Garches, they followed similar arrangements along a nine-square planar grid and thus contained a similar belief in a mathematical standard.[57] As the title suggests, the ideal played a significant part in the essay, and Rowe's aim was to show that a universal mathematical ideal provided a basis for the villas and connected them to a common archetype. According to Rowe, in Palladio's architecture this was mostly apparent in the plan, which he saw as "an exhibition of "natural" beauty, as the pure thing, abstract and uncomplicated."[58] Conversely, the platonic rationale of the façades was according to Rowe "vitiated by traditional presence," and much more influenced by the customary demands of the classical orders. This made the façade more suggestive and evocative in its conflict between the abstract and the customary and conventional, while the plan was much more illustrative of the elementary mathematical regulation. For Le Corbusier, it was the façade which provided this direct illustration, while the plan was less direct. As Rowe asserted: "conceptually, all is clear; but sensuously, all is deeply perplexing."[59] He emphasized this complex tension between the ideal and the perceived or between the "absolute and contingent, the abstract and the natural." [60] Eisenman's emphasis on the relationship between the generic and specific form employed in

[56] Colin Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern architecture" in Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays*. 6. Originally published in *The Architectural Review* (1950)
[57] Rowe, "Mathematics of the Ideal Villa." In Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays*. 9
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid. 12
[60] Ibid. 14

his dissertation, or the deep structure and surface structure he used later in the early houses in the house series was similar to this. Architectural meaning could thus be understood as a result of the interpretation of this relationship.

As discussed in the first chapter, if the existence of architectural works relied on an abstract, Platonic Form, one could say that the architecture was simply existing in an ideal, Platonic world, and that by interpreting the perceived forms of a building we are getting at the hidden "architectural meaning" existing in this platonic ideal. By doing the formal analysis one could get closer to this architecture of architecture, which was important for both Rowe and Eisenman. Since they both focus on the ambiguities which occur in the relationship between the ideal and the real, neither Eisenman nor Rowe explicitly stated that they are idealists, but it would be necessary to classify them so if they believe that there is some immaterial ideal basis for architecture.

Both Eisenman and Rowe had obvious idealist leanings, and later in their careers both developed a position which focused more on architecture's changing or undecidable meanings and not necessarily on the prominence of ideal form. They both relied on abstraction, but abstraction does not need a postulation of an ideal form or meaning. Abstraction could, for instance, be mentally produced. In "Mannerism and Modern Architecture" Rowe asserted that "a work of art lives according to the laws of the mind, and some form of abstraction clearly must form a basis for all artistic achievement."[61] Here he discussed abstraction in cubist art, which had a major influence on modern architecture, and stated that "abstraction presupposes a mental order of which it is representative." [62] This is contrary to Eisenman's tendency to reject positions that identified architecture with mental contents. As with the "Mathematics of the Ideal Villa," Rowe compared and connected Modern art and architecture with Renaissance and Mannerist art and architecture. So, he says that in cubist art and subsequently modern architecture, abstraction was mental, and "makes reference to a world of personal sensation and, in the end, typifies only the private workings of the artist's mind," while in Renaissance art, abstraction "makes reference to a world of ideal Forms, asserts what the artists believes to be objective truth, and typifies what he considers to be the scientific workings of the universe."[63] For Rowe, the difference between the two was that modern art and architecture related the world to a private symbolism, while Renaissance art and architecture related it to a

[61] Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," in Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays*. 40
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

public, shared one. This is not what Eisenman implied in his dissertation, where the aim was to find the universal basis of modern architecture.

According to Rowe, the art and architecture of the late 19th century, which preceded modern architecture, relied on a romantic attitude towards sensation, which was too visual in its reliance on the workings of the eye.[64] He argued that this attitude forced the advocates of the modern movement to reconnect architecture with society and attach buildings to a public symbolism once again. However, the belief that this was supposed to be found in the function or social purpose of modern architecture was not what Rowe had in mind.[65] The connection he sought was "formal" opposed to functional, and these forms were related to the ideal. This meant that the abstraction Rowe sought to discuss was not purely mental after all since it relied on the demands and workings of an ideal component. But this ideal component was always in relation to the more contingent demands of architecture, for instance, the context and program, and in a relation to the demands of the discipline of architecture. As Emmanuel Petit stated about role of the architect in Rowe's writings: "architects are not simply providers to diverse clients and stakeholders who seek isolated solutions but also that they act from the standpoint of a disciplinary and conceptual expertise, in which buildings on one hand, and ideas on the other, are always in dialogue."[66] This wrestling back and forth between the ideal and the physical, conceptual and visual, which was fundamental in Rowe's conception of architecture, was especially apparent in the Mannerism of the 16th century and the modernism of the early 20th century. Meaning was thus thought to be continuously uncovered in these complex layers and was open for a continuous interpretation or rereading.[67]

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[64] Rowe wrote: "It was not until the later eighteenth century that with Romanticism and the empirical philosophy of the Enlightenment, there emerged their corollary, the direct pictorial approach to architecture, and its evaluation according to impact on the eye." Rowe called this the "pictorial, rationalistic, universalized premises of the opening century." Ibid. 41

[65] Rowe discusses Le Corbusier's architecture as a reaction to the 19th century Beaux Arts tradition. "*Towards a New Architecture* proposes programmes of social realism, within which architecture, generated by function, structure or technique, is to acquire objective significance as symbolizing the processes of society. But it becomes clear that for reasons of the same indecision the essential 'realism' of these programmes cannot be converted into a system of public symbolism." In Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," in Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays*. 41. This was also true for Rowe's characterization of Eisenman and his contemporaries. In the introduction to the *Five Architects*, he noted that one of the problems with their architecture was that it was devoid of social purpose and function. Colin Rowe, "Introduction: Five Architects," in *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[66] Emmanuel Petit, "Introduction" In Emmanuel Petit, ed., *Reckoning with Colin Rowe: Ten Architects Take Position* (New York: Routledge, 2015). 21

[67] Rowe was often unclear and ambiguous in his writings, and that was what he admired in both Mannerism and modern architecture: "At this time it is as though the eye received a decisive twist, by which, since it demanded

Le Corbusier was, according to Rowe, exposing this ambiguity. Both a geometric order affirmative of universal truths where architecture achieves "a state of platonic grandeur," and the more visually oriented "correct play of masses brought together in light," contributed to this ambiguity.[68] With these early essays, it is unclear if meaning in architecture was seen as relying solely on a platonic ideal. Nevertheless, idealism was apparent in Rowe's search for an ahistorical autonomy for architecture. His connection of Modernism and the Renaissance was thus a way to show that modern architecture was a part of a long trajectory of architecture through time and not an obvious break with the past.

When it comes to the distinction between form and content, both Rowe and Eisenman gave priority to form, but as I discussed earlier, this did not mean that form was conceived as the meaningless physical properties of a building perceived directly. The formal in architecture did, for Rowe, get its signification from its relation to the culturally developed disciplinary knowledge.[69] This meant that he was not emphasizing form itself but the ambiguous relationship between the perceived form and the reading and interpretation of this form.

In *Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal*, written together with Robert Slutzky, Rowe presented a reading of cubist art and early modernist architecture where he discussed the ambiguous and the possibility of multiple readings. "Transparency" was a term for Rowe which by definition was unclear since it was a "simultaneous perception of different spatial locations."[70] Here, he made a distinction between the literal and the phenomenal which was translated into architecture as "an argument between real and ideal space," which in turn produced a complex and ambiguous multiplicity of meanings. As Emmanuel Petit has described it, "deep space was thus not simply a physical attribute of the building, but the result of a psycho-philosophical reading of an ideal perceiver of architecture, whose visual literacy is built on the knowledge of historical precedent."[71] This meant that architectural meaning was always to be understood in relation to the loosely defined architecture culture, or discipline of architecture.

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visual ambiguity, it could produce it in contemporary works, and to discover it in a previous age, even in works of apparently unimpeachable correctness." See: Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," in Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays*. 51

[68] Ibid. 42

[69] Ibid. 10

[70] Robert Slutzky Colin Rowe, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," *Perspecta* 8 (1963). 45

[71] Petit, *Reckoning with Colin Rowe: Ten Architects Take Position*.17

As mentioned above, Eisenman adopted Rowe's method of history and way of analyzing buildings of the past. For Rowe, this operative use of history was employed to construct a culture for architecture.[72] He did not study the written arguments of the architects of the past but conducted a reading of form detached from these writings. This helped to construct a context-independent comparison between Palladio and Corbusier, and between Mannerism and Modernism. With these comparisons, Rowe emphasized continuity between the Renaissance and Modernism, whereas Eisenman sought, at least in his early work, to give a formal analysis where time was bracketed out. Later, historical precedent became more important for Eisenman as well. Common to these methods was that the interpretation of architecture had a basis in its historical references and the conventions of the discipline. As Rowe wrote about Villa Malcontenta in the "Mathematics of the Ideal Villa:"

> The reference to the Pantheon in the superimposed pediments of the Malcontenta, profound in both idea and form, in the equivocal conjunction of temple front and domestic block; these are charged with meaning, both for what they are and what they signify; and their impression is poignant. By such apparatus the ancient house is not recreated, but something far more significant is achieved: a creative nostalgia evokes a manifestation of mythical power in which the Roman and the ideal are equated.[73]

And about the more indefinite eclecticism of Le Corbusier's Villa Stein:

> While allusion at the Malcontenta is concentrated and direct, at Garches it is dissipated and inferential. Within the one cube the performance attempts the roman; but within the other, no such exclusive cultural ideal is entertained. Instead, as the sponsors of his virtuosity, Le Corbusier largely selects a variety of hitherto undiscriminated phenomena. He selects the casual incidents of Paris, or Istanbul, or wherever it may be; aspects of the fortuitously picturesque, of the mechanical, of objects conceived to be typical, of whatever might seem to represent the present and the usable past; and all those items, while transformed by their new context, retain their original implications which signify maybe platonic ideality, maybe rococo intimacy, maybe mechanical precision, maybe a process of natural selection.[74]

[72] This is also discussed by Eisenman and Pier Vittorio Aureli in Pier Vittorio Aureli Peter Eisenman, "A project is a lifelong thing; if you see it, you will only see it at the end," *Log*, no. 28 (2013).
[73] Rowe, "Mathematics of the Ideal Villa." In Rowe, *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays*. 15
[74] Ibid.

Rowe continued to assert that, contrary to Palladio, there was nothing final about the possible relationships between the forms in the works of Le Corbusier.

Eisenman's use of the historical precedents, or more precisely the interpretation of contemporary architecture based on historical precedents, was thus largely an effect of the work of Colin Rowe and his predecessors. His method of formal analysis and the comparisons between contemporary and historical buildings shows that the architectural meanings were based on agreement in the discipline of architecture. This would entail that the interpretation of buildings was an intellectual activity, and that the meaning of an architectural work was produced in the mind of individuals or groups of individuals, like the discipline of architecture. However, Rowe treats the historical precedents and the meanings based on these precedents as ideal and absolute. This situates architecture in a version of Karl Popper's third world one would say, as discussed in the first chapter. Thus understood, architectural meaning is a third world object, emerging from human beings, but with an extramental, abstract existence. This is the position that Eisenman develops in his own analysis of buildings.

### 2.6 Close Reading

The interpretation and analysis of buildings that Eisenman has done throughout his career rests on two important assumptions. First, as discussed in the first chapter, Eisenman holds a general definition of architecture as something other than or different from perceivable physical buildings. Second, this assumption rests on the view that if buildings have architectural qualities, these qualities must be inferred from the building, which in turn requires an interpretation or what Eisenman calls a "close reading." The close reading suggests that one can extract meaning from the analysis of works of architecture. As Stan Allen explained in the introduction to *Ten Canonical Buildings*, "it is the buildings themselves that are the source of ideas in architecture, and not applied philosophical concepts from outside the discipline."[75] For Eisenman, close reading is a way to find the architecture of buildings, or more precisely to find in what way certain projects question architectural problems.[76] A question which arises is what separates this close reading from other kinds of interpretations. Since the object of close reading is to "see the unseen," which is to "see like an architect,"[77] it is the architectural meaning that Eisenman is searching for.

[75] Stan Allen, "Foreword," in Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000*.
[76] Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000*. 21
[77] Taken from the course description: formal analysis and close reading, Yale, 2015

In the opening paragraph of his dissertation, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, Eisenman addressed history directly and quoted the American historian Carl Becker and said: "history, the question of facts and how they are related, has replaced reason and logic."[78] From this, Eisenman concluded that "the modern movement has tended to identify itself with change and ideas of change, because it too has conceived itself to be a permanent revolution and consequently its particular mode of speculation has been historical rather than logical."[79] For Eisenman, this caused a misinterpretation of the theoretical basis of modern architecture, and as a basis for his dissertation, Eisenman wanted to provide an alternative to this "historicist" view. The alternative was critical rather than historical and concerned "the relationship of form to architecture in a theoretical and not a historical sense."[80] With this ambition, Eisenman approached buildings as structures of logical discourse with the interaction of "spatial and volumetric propositions." Buildings could in this way be analyzed without considering the symbolic or iconographic meanings they had historically, and one could reach a more timeless or "ahistorical" understanding of buildings.[81] This is a more explicit statement made than Rowe and suggests a more idealist position.

In Eisenman's analysis of buildings in *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, he used words like "expression" and "representation" to describe what could be interpreted to be the architectural meaning of works. For instance, in the reading of Casa Del Fascio by Giuseppe Terragni, Eisenman wrote that the mass was "representing the generic internal state, and surface representing the distortion of that state by external forces." Generic form was structured in four different ways: volume, surface, mass, and movement, and in the Casa del Fascio, this created something he called a "mass-surface dialectic." The building was "the expression of a reconciliation between a centroidal plan and a linear site" where "mass" represented the centroidal aspects of the generic form, and "surface" represented a linear deformation of this form.[82] This created a kind of tension in the architectural object since the mass of the building was derived from a volumetric cube, and the programmatic requirements "representing the distortion from a generic cube to the specific form of a half-cube." Eisenman continued to present these kinds of formal contradictions as a basis for the

[78] Eisenman, *The formal basis of modern architecture*., 11
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid. 15
[81] Ibid. 17
[82] Ibid. 23

transformative potential inherent in architectural form.[83] This analysis was typical for Eisenman's dissertation and did not address meaning directly. Nevertheless, it was about the interpretation of buildings and concerned what he later called implied meaning rather than explicit meaning.[84] Eisenman claimed that the Casa del Fascio inspired him deeply because it was more metaphysical or more mysterious, it was something other than Mies van der Rohe or Le Corbusier.[85] Again, we can discern the hints to the ideal leanings that separated Eisenman's early works from Rowe.

Terragni's architecture was analyzed by Eisenman throughout his career, and this work was collected in the monograph *Guiseppe Terragni, Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques.* Eisenman called his interpretations critical textual analyses, which "refer to something specific to the architectural object that disturbs the finite attributes and can only be articulated or discerned through a different interpretative language."[86] Eisenman's previous readings had only considered the formal and the relationships between the generic and specific form, but here he also invoked the human subject as a structuring part of the analysis. His previous attempts at the elimination of the subject to replace a cultural or social meaning with an architectural meaning was now changed to focus more on the undecidable and ambiguous in architectural projects. What it suggested was that the visually perceived forms provoked ambiguous, contradictory, or unstable readings. Consequently, meanings were implied from the visual, but they still had to be read and interpreted.

During the 1970s, the interpretations and analysis of form in relation to a universal generic aspect was for Eisenman supplanted by a concern with conventions and moments of change within the discipline of architecture. Contrary to the ahistorical aims of his dissertation, Eisenman was now seemingly interested in the historicity of buildings. For instance, in an analysis of James Stirling's and James Gowan's Leicester Engineering building, Eisenman discussed the novel use of bricks as a non-structural material and compared it with Le Corbusier's Maison Jaoul. In the latter building the brick was used traditionally, which meant that "its function is real rather than metaphoric. At Leicester the brick and tile are presented in such a way that their respective load bearing and surface qualities, while apparently functional, are actually often reversed; their real substance is

[83] Eisenman, "From Object to Relationship II: Casa Giuliani Frigerio: Giuseppe Terragni Casa Del Fascio." 39, Also described in: Eisenman, *Lateness*. 4
[84] Ibid. 39
[85] Eisenman's talk on lateness, MIT 12.04.2021
[86] Peter Eisenman, *Giuseppe Terragni : transformations, decompositions, critiques*, ed. Giuseppe Terragni and Manfredo Tafuri (New York: Monacelli Press, 2003).

suppressed for their real value as a metaphorical substance."[87] This displacement of the conventions could not be inferred without knowledge of the tradition of architecture, and the meaning of the Leicester engineering building was discerned from its relationship with the disciplinary conventions of architecture. Since the building denied the traditional architectural interpretations, it contained a possibility for a "textual" reading, which characterizes Eisenman's analysis of buildings from this point in his career.

The selection of buildings in his collection *Ten Canonical Buildings* is a good example of the historicity which he exhibited in the reading of the Leicester Engineering building. Eisenman explained the use of the word canonical as a "hinge as well as a rupture" with the past, which "refers to the capacity to open up to questioning problems which are essentially architectural."[88] These essentially architectural problems, which in his early works concerned the relationship between the generic and specific form, now had a much more open and changeable definition. As with the interpretations of Casa del Fascio in the Terragni monograph, the analyses in *Ten Canonical Buildings* were textual. For Eisenman, texts did manifest the legible dimension of ideas and objects while linking them with preexisting ideas and objects. The buildings brought into focus the relationship between the sign and the signified, subject and object, form and meaning, instrumentality and discourse.[89] The textual was thus supposed to address the "tissue of traces" and the works of architecture were to be understood as an "undecidable result of varying forces."[90] This shows Eisenman's interest in projects that question the conventions of architecture.

In *Ten Canonical Buildings* meaning is used in a "traditional" sense in opposition to form and not as an intrinsic part of the formal relationships as previously argued, While the formal "describes the conditions in architecture that can be read not necessarily in terms of meaning or aesthetics, but in their own internal consistency,"[91] the textual initiate the idea of change, which addresses the instability of meaning. The façade of Alberti's church, Sant' Andrea in Mantua, is said to destabilize a singular meaning because of its montage of architectural forms from different historical periods.[92] I will come back to a more specific reading of this work a bit later, but it is worth noting the tendency Eisenman has to generalize

[87] Peter Eisenman, "Real and English: The destruction of the box," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963-1988* ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven Yale University Press, 1974/2004). 63. First published in Oppositions
[88] Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000*. 21
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid. 27
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid. 29

and attribute meaning on the basis of a historical period rather than to buildings or individuals interpreting these buildings.

So, how does Eisenman attribute meanings to works of architecture in *Ten Canonical Buildings*? It is probably better to say that meanings are suggested because one of the general assumptions in the book concerns the undecidability of readings and consequently the undecidability of meanings. In general, Eisenman addresses the relationship between an "actual" and a "conceptual" experience. For instance, the Casa Girasole by Luigi Moretti is selected for its ability to "manifest a hybrid condition of both abstraction and literal figured representation."[93] The seemingly oppositional conditions are never resolved as a single narrative, meaning or image. According to Eisenman, this is manifested by the central division of two solids in the facade of the Casa Girasole, which contained many ambiguities. A physical ambiguity was explained by its views, since it could be viewed frontally as a "cleft volume" or obliquely as a "screen."[94] This ambiguity was developed in the corners of the facade: "if the corner was a dominant motif of the neoclassical, and if the frontal picture plane was a dominant motif of the modern, then Moretti's Casa "Il Girasole" uses elements of each while breaking with both traditions."[95] In addition, Moretti was using the historical motif of an aedicule, but since it was divided into two similar, but not identical volumes, it was ambiguous. The building was neither to be viewed "prospectively as Greek space" nor "frontal as modern Roman space."[96] Thus, Luigi Moretti's "calibrated arbitrariness calls attention to its own condition as arbitrary in an internal referencing that is textual rather than purely meaningful." The textual analysis that Eisenman employed rested on his assumptions of the conventions and generalized meanings of the past and the present, and since these were changing, the analysis worked as an inexhaustive contextualization of the buildings. The readings were supposed to avoid synthesis and closure and favored the endless possibilities of the new.

The relationship between the "conceptual" and the "actual" was the source for these endless possibilities of meaning, and even if Eisenman emphasized the importance of the physically present and visually perceived, he gave primacy to the conceptual and implied meanings. For Eisenman, in Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, it was not the distance between the columns or the proportions of the slabs that is important, but what it implied.

[93] Ibid. 30
[94] Ibid. 31
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid. 32

Since, the columns were both structure and the representation of that structure, they were read "not for their tectonic truthfulness, or for their visual composition, but for their condition as a sign of a conceptual diagram."[97]

In the chapter about Rossi's Cemetery of San Cataldo, Eisenman discusses the types of geometrical shapes and the critique of modernist abstraction. Eisenman's claim was that Rossi's building illustrates the problems of meaning since the iconic forms are stripped of their iconicity. They are taken out of an aesthetic and functional context, and out of scale. "There is a play between the real and the abstract, between the scale of objects, and between the familiarity of objects which breaks down conventions that are attached to meaning, abstraction, form and scale."[98] Eisenman was referring to Le Corbusier's assumption that when a window is too small or too large, we are in the presence of architecture. If the window was right, "the building is merely a building."[99] This meant that the architecture of a building was defined as the disturbance or displacement of conventions. For Eisenman, architecture had to invoke a need for "something other."[100] The presence of a building was thus always read in relationship with that which was not there, and this other could only be found through a close reading.

What the close readings of architectural works shows is the amount of energy Eisenman spent on the criticism of the belief in one true meaning. especially since it is not clear if architectural works have one true meaning. Eisenman did not aim to abolish meaning as a fundamental aspect of architecture, but rather to establish the undecidability of meaning as architecture's basis. That is why Eisenman was mostly interested in works that have this ability, at least later in his career. In the next section of this chapter, I will try to explain what might have motivated this interest. Further discussion will follow in chapter 4, where the establishment of an architectural Avant-garde is used to explain Eisenman's motivations.

### 2.7 The Present Otherness

The belief in architecture's relation with the general thoughts of its time, or worldview, is thoroughly present in Eisenman's writings. In the 1980s he dealt specifically with meaning related to the thoughts of the time, which Eisenman called both a spirit of the time, *Zeitgeist*,

[97] Ibid. 59
[98] Ibid. 184
[99] Eisenman and Roman, *Palladio virtuel*. 11
[100] Christopher Alexander Peter Eisenman, "The Debate: Contrasting Concepts of Harmony in Architecture," in *Studio Works 7 (Harvard university Graduate School of Design)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

*episteme* or even cosmology.[101] This is apparent in "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," where Eisenman considered meaning to be crucial in one of three "fictions" which had been governing architecture since the Renaissance. The three "fictions" were representation, reason, and history and each had a different purpose. "Representation was to embody the idea of meaning; reason was to codify the idea of truth; and history was to recover the idea of the timeless from the idea of change."[102] The "fiction" of representation was the simulation of meaning, and with this emphasis on reference, Eisenman connected architecture with language and pointed to a presumably changed condition for both language and architecture which occurred in the Renaissance.

> The meaning of language was in a "face value" conveyed within representation; in other words, the way language produced meaning could be represented within language. Things *were*; truth and meaning were self-evident. The meaning of a Romanesque or gothic cathedral was in itself; it was *de facto*. Renaissance buildings, on the other hand – and all buildings after them that pretended to be "architecture" – received their value by representing an already valued architecture, by being simulacra (representations of representations) of antique buildings; they were *de jure*. The *message* of the past was used to verify the *meaning* of the present. Precisely because of this need to verify, Renaissance architecture was the first simulation, an unwitting fiction of the object.[103]

Here, Eisenman makes a distinction between a *message* and *meaning*, which is similar to the previously discussed distinctions between an external meaning and inherent architectural meaning. An illustration of this point is given in the footnotes, where Eisenman describes the destabilizing façade of Alberti's church of Sant Andrea in Mantua. The use of a classical temple front and a triumphal arch was one of the first examples of "a transposition of ancient building types to achieve both verification and authority."[104] According to Eisenman, on the one hand, the temple front signified a temple function similar to the church of the fifteenth century rooted the façade to the "vernacular." On the other hand, Eisenman claimed that the

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[101] Eisenman used the word "Cosmology" in the debate with Christopher Alexander. Peter Eisenman, "The Debate: Contrasting Concepts of Harmony in Architecture." Also discussed in Peter Eisenman, "Strong Form, Weak Form," in *Re:working Eisenman* (London The Academy Group 1993). Eisenman, Strong Form, Weak Form, In Re:working Eisenman, 51

[102] Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984/2004). 153. First published in *Perspecta* vol. 21, (1984)

[103] Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End."156

[104] Ibid. 157

overlay of a triumphal arch was a method for Alberti to question the authority of God and make use of man's own symbols of power. "The use of the triumphal arch becomes a message on the façade of Sant Andrea rather than an embodiment of its inherent meaning."[105] What Eisenman points at is the conscious use and break with architectural tropes and conventions to signify the very process of meaning. The question is if architectural elements could have an "inherent meaning" which is undisputed and universal. But this was deemed unimportant because what was interesting for Eisenman was to show that common beliefs changed in the Renaissance, and that architecture in some way follows this common belief. Eisenman claimed that the belief in an architecture "as is" with a meaning "embodied in the figures itself" was thus thought to be superstition from the Middle Ages. So, from the Renaissance on, there were no longer any self-evident values. For instance, according to Eisenman, in the Renaissance one replicated the classical orders which had significance as "defining the classical," but the use of these orders today would not pass because the value system is no longer relevant and it would only function as a message.[106] From this one could infer that an inherent meaning is unattainable, but that the process of finding this meaning was still of interest. This will become apparent when discussing Eisenman's own project in the next chapter.

Eisenman relied on two important theoretical terms for his analysis in "The End of the Classical." The first was Michel Foucault's concept of the *episteme* and his analysis of the change that occurred between the "classical" and the "modern" *episteme*. A change which has, according to Eisenman, "never been articulated in relationship to architecture," and the essay is a call for this to happen. The second source is Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation, which in short is the representation of a dead reality where the distinction between reality and representation is totally dissolved.[107] In architecture the "modern" was still to be thought of as Foucault's "classical" *episteme*. What Eisenman argued was that the same mode of representation has been persistent in architecture from the fifteenth century up to the present day, and that this had made representation in architecture into a fictional simulation.[108] For Eisenman, the classical did mean that there could be a timeless, meaningful, and true architecture, and that architects should search for these assumed *a priori* origins. By applying Baudrillard's term, Eisenman aimed to show that these origins were always simulations,

[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid. 158
[107] Ibid. 159
[108] Eisenman wrote that "The message of the past was a simulation of the meaning of the present." Ibid.

which meant that meaning becomes meaningless because it lacked a reality that secured its meaning. [109] The "moderns" were also "simulating" since "they thought they were transforming the field of referential figuration to that of non-referential "objectivity."[110] However, they were just replacing the givens (function and technology) which the forms of architecture were referring to, and not the mode of reference. Eisenman claimed that the "moderns'" attempt to represent realism was then a manifestation of the same fiction wherein meaning and value reside outside the world of an architecture "as is," in which representation is about its own meaning rather than being a message of another previous meaning."[111]

All this points to "the burden of meaning," which was present in all of architecture from the Renaissance up to today. However, Eisenman did not propose to return to a correct and truthful representation of the inherent meaning of architecture because this was just a fiction or simulation. Nor did he propose a new model for a theory of architecture because "all such models are ultimately futile."[112] What could be proposed was just a series of characteristics, which were "the meaning free, arbitrary and timeless," which free architecture from any external values. Eisenman labelled this the "not-classical," a term which just suggested something "other" rather than anything new, which in turn could be open for the same criticism as Eisenman proposed. This otherness will be elaborated in the next chapter, which covers Eisenman's own projects and their relationship with meaning. For now, it is enough to mention that the only "architecture as is", which Eisenman could accept was this elusive meaning-free and arbitrary otherness, which was related to the present but still was not representing it. The question is then: how does this otherness manifest itself in architecture? To shed light on this problem it is necessary to see what some of Eisenman's contemporary architects thought about meaning.

### 2.8 Venturi, Rossi and the Architecture about Architecture

Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi are useful examples among Eisenman's contemporaries who dealt explicitly with meaning, both in theory and in practice. Their views are worth discussing at this point to see why meanings were so important in the architectural theory of the second

[109] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*, Simulacres et simulation, (Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 1994). 11
[110] Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End." 158
[111] Ibid. 157
[112] Ibid. 166

half of the 20th century, and to see how meaning was given to both cities and buildings. According to Eisenman, Venturi was the foremost theoretical authority in American architecture with the publication of *Complexity and Contradiction* in 1966.[113] In this book Venturi operated as an architecture critic who emphasized a specific way of seeing architecture.[114] He was influenced by the literary criticism of T.S Elliot, and his goal was to conduct an analysis and comparison of architecture by breaking it up into elements to reach a better understanding. Like Eisenman, the use of historical precedents was necessary in the analysis and Venturi quoted Elliot on the importance of tradition and a historical sense, "which is a sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and the timeless and temporal together, and it is what makes a writer traditional, and it is at the same time, what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity."[115] Venturi acknowledged that no artist or architect worked in isolation with his own complete exhaustive meaning, and at the same time he wanted to write about what he liked and gave emphasis to, as the title says, complexity and contradiction. This included both Louis Kahn's question on what a thing wants to be, and the opposite, what the architect wants the thing to be.

Just as Eisenman, Venturi sought the present in the past and relied on the "inherent characteristics of specific buildings," and not on the historical context. Architecture was supposed to be studied in relation to architecture and historical accuracy was not pursuedbecause the reading of buildings was done in relation to the present. As Venturi wrote: "This book is an analysis of what seems to be true for architecture now."[116] Consequently, the theme of Venturi's book was precisely meaning, and he asserted that the "richness of meaning" was preferred over clarity of meaning, which meant that "both-and" was better than "either-or."[117] Like Eisenman, Venturi promoted the richness, contradictions and ambiguities in architectural works. Venturi asserted that "a valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combinations of focus: its space and its elements become readable and workable in several ways at once."[118] This was "the very process of meaning in art: The complexity and

[113] Eisenman mentioned this in a lecture at IIT Architecture Chicago, Peter Eisenman, *Dean's Lecture Video: Peter Eisenman* (Chicago: IIT Architecture 2016). https://vimeo.com/186043555 Accessed: 16.10.2021
[114] This was stated in the preface in: Robert Venturi, *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*, vol. 1, Museum of modern art, Papers on architecture, (New York, 1966). 13
[115] Ibid. Venturi was quoting T.S Elliot Selected Essays 1917-1932, Harcourt, Brace and co., New York, 1932; 3-4
[116] Ibid. 14
[117] Ibid. 16
[118] Ibid.

contradiction that results from the juxtaposition of what an image is and what it seems."[119] For Venturi, architecture was form *and* substance – abstract *and* concrete, in its varying levels of meaning it bred ambiguity and tension.

In *Complexity and Contradiction*, he continued to discuss how to achieve these multiplicities of meanings. For instance, he introduced the double-functioning element, which contained double meaning, both an old meaning and a new meaning, like a column which is both structural and decorative.[120] Venturi also wrote about conventional elements organized unconventionally for the creation of new meanings and to change the context. All these elements contributed to the supposedly complex and contradictory meanings of architecture, but Venturi, as Eisenman, never addressed the nature of meaning explicitly. Unlike Eisenman, however, he did not neglect subjective interpretations, and therefore he allowed for the possibility that meanings were nothing but mental states and were thus produced by individuals or groups of individuals. In the acknowledgement of the complex and contradictory ways architecture was imbued with meaning, there was an acknowledgement of the contingent and arbitrary ways individuals give meaning to things. What contradicts this position is the way meaning is supposed to be found in works of architecture, and the primacy given to the inherent meanings, but it is never completely clear what kind of meaning Venturi has in mind.

Central in Venturi's writings was the belief in architecture as a system of communication, and if Eisenman was concerned with the syntax of this system, Venturi was concerned with its semantics. With Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour, Venturi developed a method of analysis that was based on the premise that architecture worked as a system of communication. Las Vegas was the perfect place for this analysis because of the domination of symbols and signs over space. In *Learning from Las Vegas,* the aim was to show how architecture and elements of architecture could work as signs and bearers of meaning. Thus, the distinction between the "Duck," as the building *as* symbol, and the "Decorated Shed", as the conventional shelter that *applies* symbols, was concerned with the symbolic meaning.[121] Even if both kinds were valid as architecture, Venturi and Scott-Brown claimed that the duck was seldom relevant today. The decorated shed with its rhetorical front and conventional behind was preferred for its possibility to address architecture in relation to

[119] Ibid. 20
[120] Ibid. 38
[121] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, 1972). 87.

architecture. For instance, in Venturi's Guild House the elements both were and looked like its being, the windows both were windows and looked like windows, but they were also slightly too large. They were conventional elements used slightly unconventionally and thus expressed the internal symbolism of architecture, unlike Paul Rudolph's Crawford Manor, which was built conventionally, but did not look conventional and was thus labelled a duck[122] (fig 2.1 and 2.2). The question is whether there was a difference in meaning as well. According to Venturi, the symbolism of the two houses was different. In the Guild House it was explicit, whereas in the Crawford Manor it was implicit. In the former the explicit associations were directly readable because it looked like what it was and also what it reminded the viewer of, while in the latter, since it did not look like anything directly readable, its "meanings come from our knowledge of technology, from the work and writings of the modern form givers, from the vocabulary of industrial architecture, and other sources."[123] In this sense the difference was not in the nature of meaning because we have reasons to believe that the meanings of both buildings were mental contents, and thus existed in relation to what one knew and believed. The meaning of the Guild House existed in relation to other buildings and their conventions, and the Crawford Manor in relation to "other sources." The most explanatory comparison between the two was that the former was "old words with new meanings," while the latter was just "new words."

[122] Ibid. 92
[123] Ibid. 93


**Fig. 2.1** (left) Robert Venturi's Guild House, a decorated shed. **Fig 2.2** (right) Paul Rudolph's Crawford manor, a duck.[124]

Like Eisenman, Venturi was trying to make architecture about architecture, and consequently gave primacy to a certain kind of meaning and symbolism or what architecture was about, rather than its physical properties. With *The Architecture of the City*, published the same year as Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction*, Aldo Rossi explicated a similar position. Even if the stated goal of the book was the form of the city, he did spend a substantial number of pages on the meaning of architecture. In the introduction to the American edition Rossi asserted that: "this is the meaning of the architecture of the city; like the figure in the carpet, the figure is clear, but everyone reads it in a different way. Or rather, the clearer it is, the more open it is to a complex evolution."[125]

[124] Fig. 2.1: Smallbones, *The Guild House in Philadelphia*, 2013, Photograph. Wikimedia commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guildhouse_Philly.JPG. Fig. 2: Richard Guy Wilson, *Paul Rudolph: Crawford Manor*, 1966, Artstor CC, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/UVA_FISKE_106711340068;prevRouteTS=1668816000154,

[125] This was stated by Rossi in the introduction to American edition of *The Architecture of the City* in: Aldo Rossi and Peter Eisenman, *The architecture of the city*, L'architettura della citta, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1982). 19

Form was emphasized as an object of study in opposition to the modernist function, but as mentioned, meaning was the main objective. Rossi said that the city was the collective work of art and "the quality of architecture, the quality of human creation was the meaning of the city."[126] For Rossi, the complex whole of the city consisted of urban artifacts imbued with a collective memory which in turn constituted an almost archaic typology. This typology was thought of as the study of the elements that could not be further reduced and was thus an effort to define the essence of architecture. As with both Eisenman and Venturi, Rossi sought to address the complexity that existed in the relationship between the form of architecture, or the form of the city, and its meaning. However, Rossi was more direct in asserting where the meaning resided. In the modernist critique, there was an aim to emphasize the continuity of the city and its relation to history. Rossi asserted that history was "the soul of the city," and that the city was the "locus" of collective memory.[127]

> The union between the past and the future exist in the very idea of the city that it flows through in the same way that memory flows through the life of a person; and always, in order to be realized, this idea must not only shape but be shaped by reality. This shaping is a permanent aspect of a city's unique artifacts, monuments, and the idea we have of it. It also explains why in antiquity the founding of a city became part of that city's mythology.[128]

Even if Rossi was hesitant to postulate a complete predetermined process of the giving of form and meaning to the city, he still sought some kind of origin to secure the autonomy of architecture. Since the complex structure of the city evolved from fragmentary forces difficult to pin down, there was a certain belief in a "personal soul" that each city had, and the architecture was thought to express this soul. The architecture of the city was thus the physical sign of a "biography" which was "beyond the meanings and feelings with which we recognize it."[129] All these assertions point to a sort of supra-human force that in one way or another governs the shape of buildings and cities, and it was for Rossi rooted in a specific place. In this sense, Rossi's emphasis on place is comparable to the views of Christian Norberg Schulz. He also tried to establish a similar connection between place and meaning in architecture, but before I present his views, let me return to Eisenman and his continuous search for meaning in architecture.

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[126] Ibid. 101
[127] Ibid. 130
[128] Ibid. 131
[129] Ibid. 163

### 2.9 Subverting the Conventional Meanings

In "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and The Self-Referential sign," Eisenman asserted that the most fundamental change in architecture gets articulated in plan and section. But he was nevertheless more interested in what these drawings said about some underlying themes or aspects. In this instance, he was interested in the change from a theocentric to an anthropocentric conception of the world.[130] "They are the primary notational devices that reflect both changing concepts of use and meaning and the technical capacity to produce such changes."[131] In a comparison between Charles Garnier's Paris Opera House and Le Corbusier's Maison Dom-ino, Eisenman wrote:

> One witnesses an alteration of space so fundamental as to announce historical rupture. The abandonment of the plaid grid of the opera house to the free plan of the Dom-ino, possibly the most critical changes ever in the continuous cycle of changes, appears to herald a decisive cultural phenomenon: the birth of a modernist sensibility that is to parallel and even supersede Western thought.[132]

Modernism was for Eisenman a state of mind, and this state of mind was to be expressed in the ability for architecture to be "self-referential." Contrary to his earlier work against cultural-generated meanings, Eisenman was now suggesting that architecture was supposed to be in line with the general state of mind, and this was supposed to be found through the previously described method of "close reading." What separated Eisenman's reading of modern architecture from more traditional readings was that he, like Venturi, read it in modern terms rather than within a Renaissance thought, which he accused Colin Rowe of having. This had, according to Eisenman, obscured one of the aspects of Le Corbusier's work that made it truly modernist: "that is, its aspect as a self-referential sign, its existence as an architecture about architecture."[133] The architecture was not to be read as conceived by man, representing man and his condition, but rather to refer to itself. This other reading was warranted by Eisenman's need to connect it with the new modern sensibility. The old view, that architecture was supposed to represent shelter, function, structure, or geometry was no

[130] Peter Eisenman, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential sign," *Log*, no. 30 (2014). 139. First published in in *Oppositions 15/16* (1980). Also published in: Peter Eisenman, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Print, 1980/2004).
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid. 140
[133] Ibid. 141

longer necessary for it to be architecture, because when one "considered signification, it was in terms of meaning which was extrinsic to architecture itself – that is, to ideas which related architecture to man rather than to extrinsic ideas which explained architecture itself."[134] Again, Eisenman was pointing to some intrinsic or architectural meaning, and again, the question is whether this architectural meaning was fundamentally different from any other meaning.

Throughout the 1970s Eisenman abandoned the ambitions of a universal deep or generic structure governing architectural form. This deep structure, or Platonic universal aspects, secured the possibility to ground meaning and overcome the subjective perception and interpretation in his early works. But since he abandoned this foundation, the nature of meaning became elusive. Without this stable foundation, Eisenman shifted his focus in the late 1970s to self-referential architecture. This is especially apparent in his own projects, which I will discuss in the next chapter. Self-referential architecture was based on conventions and Eisenman emphasized ways in which architecture was read according to how it transgressed, subverted, or displaced these conventions. Meaning was thus dependent on accepted conventions, which in turn were determined by the discipline of architecture. For instance, Eisenman's attack on the representation of function was based on a conventional understanding of function as the giver of meaning to a work of architecture. As Eisenman said about representation: "clearly the representation of function has always been architecture's primary form of embodiment."[135] The aim thus became to disturb this understanding, since "it is not a question of denying the function and meaning of the object, but rather an attempt to question the legitimacy of the formal decision made in its name." He acknowledged that architecture was dependent on function and meaning, or more precisely the meaning attributed on the basis of function, and then he sought to find a way for architecture to function without using that function to legitimize its form. The question is then what Eisenman could replace as a legitimizer of form, or in other words, what could give form its meaning. The answer, hinted at earlier, was just multiplicity and undecidability. Since nothing could legitimize form, form had to recognize this impossibility. Fredric Jameson, who contributed an essay in the monograph *Blurred Zones, Peter Eisenman architects 1988-1998*, generalized these ambitions and ascribed it to postmodern philosophy:

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[134] Ibid.

[135] Peter Eisenman, "Zones of Undecidability 1, The interstitial figure: The church of the year 2000," in Peter Eisenman, *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial: Eisenman Architects 1988-1998* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2003). 159. First published (1996)

> Postmodern philosophy is most generally associated with two fundamental principles, namely anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism. These may be characterized, respectively, as the repudiation of metaphysics, that is, of any ultimate system of meaning in nature or the universe; and as the struggle against any normative idea of human nature.[136]

He further explained how art and architecture was perceived in this postmodern condition:

> It is not material—we consume it as an idea rather than a sensory presence—and it is not subject to aesthetic universalism, insofar as each of these artefacts reinvents the very idea of art in a new and non-universalizable form, so that it is in that sense even doubtful whether we should use the general term art at all for such singularity-events.[137]

Architecture and art were thus bundled together and thought of as immaterial ideas existing as singular events with no normative or generalizing capacities. So, architecture had no general content, and "resisted all subsumption under abstract or normative categories."[138] This could be interpreted to mean that architecture was simply about the meanings of a building, but that these meanings were so arbitrary and open to change that it was impossible to pin down what architecture actually is. This is in line with one of Eisenman's fundamental premises that architecture is separated from physical buildings.

With all the effort of analyzing the internal properties of form, with a continuous search for an autonomy of architecture untarnished by subjective interpretation, Eisenman was left with the assumption that the meaning of architecture must exist as an immaterial non-human entity. This conclusion is unavoidable even though this is not something that Eisenman says explicitly. In this sense, even if an interpretation or reading, which is arguably mental, must occur in order to reveal the architecture of a building, the foundation for a correct interpretation has an extra-mental existence. This is a substantial problem for Eisenman because he opposes the idea of a "correct" interpretation, whereas at the same time there are interpretations that Eisenman seems to prefer over others. The continuous process of generating new meaning and subverting the architectural conventions of the past has its own fundamental logic, and the goal for Eisenman was to produce an architecture of continuous

[136] Frederic Jameson, "Aesthetics of Singularity," in Eisenman, *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial: Eisenman Architects 1988-1998*. 125
[137] Ibid. 126
[138] Ibid.

"becoming." He stated that: "for architecture, an idea of becoming would mean that it is not subordinated to the laws of resemblance or utility, and does not produce conceptually stable forms, but rather gives priority to conditions of space in a perpetual state of becoming."[139] The best architecture was thus deemed to be what could be identified as "the most differentiated, not necessarily in numbers but in distance from previous modes."[140] So, the "right" way of doing architecture was for Eisenman always in relation to the established conventional relationship between form and meaning. Consequently, he placed architecture in the contradictory position where one was dependent on something one inevitably wanted to break free from. The tactic of blurring was employed to reach this condition:

> Blurring in architecture is not to suggest a movement from a symbolic environment to one in which there is no meaning. Rather it is to suggest a condition where architecture is neither dependent on its former narratives nor devoid of meaning but resides between the two, where other forms of meaning, and meaningful situations, can occur.[141]

As discussed earlier, this approach was arguably present in the methods of Colin Rowe and Robert Venturi, where architecture held the possibility of a continuous process of interpretation, which put meaning in the foremost position. Eisenman tried to criticize and reject meaning, and at the same time was completely dependent on it. "The system of meaning (cultural structure) of a form is denied without denying the form, but now the forms in themselves have no transcendental or *a priori* meaning. They are cut off from their former givenness. The meanings are in the relationship; the architecture is between the signs."[142] The acknowledgment that the meaning of architecture was open to continuous change may seem to be a trivial acknowledgment, especially when one considers the possibility for words to change their meanings through time and between cultures. So, an important question which occurs in this instance is why Eisenman put all this effort into destroying any "true" meaning. This effort make sense only if one understands "meaning" as being based in suprahuman universally true foundations. This aligns with the Platonist assumptions of his early theoretical

[139] Eisenman, "Processes of the interstitial: Spacing and the Arbitrary text," Eisenman, *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial: Eisenman Architects 1988-1998*. 96
[140] Ibid.
[141] Eisenman, *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial: Eisenman Architects 1988-1998*. 7
[142] Peter Eisenman, "Architecture and the Problem of the Rhetorical Figure," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987/2004).

positions that by this time he sought to reject.[143] But more importantly, it reveals the question which Eisenman does not ask: which authority ascribes meanings to works of architecture, and who decides about their meanings? As already mentioned, the discipline of architecture, or a certain part of the discipline, like the avant-garde, is a possible answer to this question. But it is not clear how architectural meanings are attributed to works of architecture, and whether these architectural meanings are like Popper's world 3 objects, being abstract and immaterial, and emerging from certain human beings. This will be the theme for the last chapter, which might help to shed light on Eisenman's avoidance of this question, which also might have helped him avoid the self-evident critique of a fixed meaning.

### 2.10 The Spirit of the Place

In the critique of functionalism, which Rowe, Venturi and Rossi participated in, meaning was pushed forward in the hierarchy of important aspects of architecture. Even if any definition of the correct meaning was avoided, this illustrates the theoretical climate in which Eisenman worked. Another architecture theorist who operated in this climate was Christian Norberg-Schulz. Contrary to Eisenman and Venturi, Norberg-Schulz was not interested in the contradictory ways meaning works, nor to displace or subvert meaning. Rather, he was concerned with the loss of meaning in modern architecture. The aim was thus to regain it. For Norberg-Schulz meaning rested on "a sense of place" and architecture was expressive of a meaningful place, which in turn was deeply rooted in nature and determined basic human activities. This *Genius Loci*, the spirit of place, was according to Norberg-Schulz the working reality of place which determined ways of living, art and dwelling structures.[144] Houses and architecture became meaningful when they were "bringing the character of the world close to us," and thus "collect the world."[145] Since human beings and activities were volatile, one was in need of stability, and this was found in "the place." A characteristic of Norberg-Schulz's writings was that he, in his aim to connect architecture with something real and tangible, often relied on spiritual and mystical aspects. Even though Eisenman has been an outspoken opponent of architectural phenomenology, there are similarities between him and Norberg-Schulz, especially when it comes to the disbelief in the possibility of individual human beings

[143] The idea that words have meanings by themselves is in Plato's Cratylus. See: Fowler, H. N., *Plato: Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias*, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1926)

[144] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Mellom jord og himmel : en bok om steder og hus*, [Ny rev. utg.]. ed., Mellom himmel og jord, (Oslo: Pax, 1992). 32

[145] Ibid. 33

to be the creators of meaning. For Norberg-Schulz, the meaning of a thing rests on its being in the world, and we as human beings do not decide these meanings, we "only uncover hidden or possible meanings."[146] The question was and is how to read these meanings in architecture.

As discussed earlier, in Eisenman's early works, an architectural meaning had a basis in something ideal and supra-human and was understood by doing a certain formal reading of a work of architecture. For Norberg-Schulz meaning was abstract, non-mental and had its basis in the ideal. Even if architectural meaning had a foundation in place, it was not in the material characteristics of place, but rather in a more esoteric and mystic spirit of the place, the *genius loci*. Meaning was thus for both Eisenman and Norberg-Schulz supposed to be found and expressed by architecture rather than produced by individuals or a culture understood as a group of individuals and their interactions. Later, Eisenman spent most of his energy on discussing the arbitrariness and undecidability of meaning, while Norberg-Schulz kept his belief in the *genius loci*, the governing spirit of place.

### 2.11 The Multiplicity of Meanings

Common to both Eisenman and his contemporary architects, Venturi, Rossi and Norberg-Schulz, was their critique of a purely functionalist determination of meaning in architecture. To summarize, Venturi was concerned with the complexities and contradictions in meaning and argued for a pluralist and eclectic use of symbolism and conventional meanings, always in relation to the past. Rossi was also interested in complexity and the many arbitrary ways architecture could form the city, but he wanted to root meaning in a more stable ground, even if this was not explicitly apparent in his buildings. For instance, in *Ten Canonical Buildings* Eisenman discussed Rossi's San Cataldo Cemetery, and pointed out that Rossi had stripped the iconic forms of their iconicity since they were taken out of their aesthetic and functional context and dissoluted. "There is a play between the real and the abstract, between the scale of objects, and between the familiarity of objects which breaks down conventions that are attached to meaning, abstraction, form and scale."[147] The most explicit of the three architects and architectural theorists discussed above was arguably Norberg-Schulz, who directly postulated that the "spirit of the place," determined the meaning of architecture as well as life in general.

[146] Ibid. 110. "Vi vil påstå at menneskene aldri skaper mening, men kun samler verden på en ny måte, det vil si avdekker skjulte eller mulige meninger.»
[147] Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000*. 183

Central in all, as well as in Eisenman's writings, was the emphasis on the meaning of architecture, the "what it is about," which framed architecture more as a loosely defined cultural activity rather than the practice of conceiving, drawing and designing buildings. Even if the physical properties were deemed important, they were important only important as means to the content and ideas. Interpretations and readings were given primacy and meaning was established through these readings. The task of the architect was thus to make buildings open to these readings, and in Eisenman's case this meant to put different ambiguous readings into the buildings. It is not entirely clear whether this means that meaning exists in the building and that it is up to the reader or interpreter to find it, but it is clear that the architect is not supposed to sit with the key to the "correct" interpretation. In *Diagram Diaries,* Eisenman trusts the diagram to work as an agency which focuses the relationship between an authorial subject, an architectural object and a receiving subject.[148] "Unlike traditional forms of representation, the diagram as a generator is a mediation between a palpable object, a real building, and what can be called architecture's interiority"[149] The diagram thus worked as a generator of multiplicity of meaning and opened a work of architecture to many different readings.

In the next chapter I further examine the ways in which this is made more or less explicit in Eisenman's own projects. This hinges on his interpretation of Jacques Derrida's theories of deconstruction and the translation of theories of language to architecture. The central theme in Eisenman's overall project is arguably meaning in architecture, and especially the destruction of any origin, center or fundamental principles which rooted this meaning. For Eisenman, "there is no universal iconic sign system in architecture, and since architecture is always a second language (that is, its language is not natural but learned), all architectural representation is coded."[150] This made architecture into a game where the rules were to understand the codes, which in turn only leads to new codes or the displacement of these codes. The game of architecture in this sense does seem to be a game that is impossible to win since a part of the game seems to be to destroy the rules altogether. A central question for the next chapter is thus to ask what might be motivating this destructive attitude and to investigate what kind of architecture one could make with this attitude. The goal, as the description of the project in Cannaregio in Venice would testify, was to see "what kinds of

[148] Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries,* 1. 35
[149] Ibid. P.27
[150] Peter Eisenman In: Cynthia C. Davidson et al., *Code X : the City of Culture of Galicia* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005). 33

overlaps, strange disjunctions, arbitrary figures, and ultimately new meanings could be produced."[151] The continuous development in parallel with the critique of new meanings was thus the core aspect of Eisenman's architecture.

[151] Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, 183

## Chapter 3

## MEANINGS AS ARCHITECTURAL CONVENTIONS

### Peter Eisenman's projects

### 3.1 Resisting Classification

Eisenman has never written a book, an essay, or any other text which defines his career or provides a total understanding of his position. He does not have a *Complexity and Contradiction* like Venturi, or an *Architecture of the City* like Rossi, but even if all of Eisenman's writings resist synthesis, they are related. The same could be said about his architectural projects. As discussed in the previous chapters, even if they are physical, they are theoretical projects imbued with ideas. These often-sprawling ideas do not help in defining Eisenman's intellectual or architectural project, but they nevertheless point to a consistent employment of certain tactics and assumptions in the design of buildings. In the introductory essay in the monograph *Tracing Eisenman*, Cynthia Davidson admitted that Eisenman resisted the idea of "complete works" and needed persuasion. The book was thus conceived as a detective novel whereby one would trace Eisenman's steps and look for different clues that would give away the motivations for his works.[1] However, the killer is not revealed at the end, and it is up to the reader to extract what Eisenman's projects say about the totality of his work. As discussed in the previous chapters, this position is not easily pinned down, but it shows Eisenman's continuous attack on three conditions of architecture: "(1) architecture's compliance with the metaphysics of presence; (2) the already motivated condition of the sign; and (3) the necessary relationship of architecture to a desiring subject."[2] In this chapter I address and discuss how Eisenman deals with these conditions in his own projects, or more precisely, investigate how he treats the relationship between meaning/signification and architecture.

This chapter is intended as a follow up of the previous chapter, and the practical consequences of Eisenman's definitions of architectural meaning are presented and discussed here. These two chapters are complementary, and the conventions of architecture, especially the conventions related to architectural meaning, are relevant. The question posed at the end

[1] Cynthia Davidson, "The Absence of Presence; Or, the Void" in Peter Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman complete works*, ed. Cynthia Davidson and Stan Allen (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006). 28

[2] Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, 1 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Universe Publishing, 1999). Eisenman, Diagram, an original scene of writing, in the Diagrams of architecture, 97

of the last chapter, the question which Eisenman does not address, about *who* defines architectural meaning, becomes more apparent if one considers his projects. Even if this question is not attacked head on in this chapter, it works as a bridge to the last chapter, where Eisenman's self-conscious relationship with the architecture culture is discussed. In the previous chapters I have discussed the fundamental assumptions Eisenman makes in his writings. This was mostly based on the assertions he makes on historical buildings and architects of the past, as well as his discussions and incorporation of intellectual trends of his time. The relationship between meaning and architecture, or at least the interpretation of architecture, has always been a core interest for Eisenman, and in this chapter the question is how his own buildings address meaning and how they are supposed to be interpreted. For him, architecture is and has always been an intellectual activity, and in order to make architecture, one must learn to read and interpret, or as mentioned earlier, to see the unseen. This meant reading the ideas inherent in architectural projects and shaking up these ideas.[3] Eisenman's buildings could therefore be thought of as didactic projects, where one is supposed to uncover these ideas. In the preface to the book *Houses of Cards*, which comprises descriptions and drawings of House I-VI, Eisenman said: "put aside a search for "the meaning" of this book and enjoy its multiplicity, its intricacies, and the layering among all of its various contributors, both present and absent."[4] This ambition is present in Eisenman's project, and an exhaustive understanding is thus unattainable.

The projects discussed in this chapter are mostly organized chronologically. However, there are overlapping themes and different lines of development in Eisenman's work. This discontinuous evolution might resist such a linear organization, but it is useful to see the enduring consistencies in his projects. As discussed in the previous chapter, Eisenman is interested in signification and meaning, and especially what the relationship between form and meaning in architecture is. So, the general theme of this chapter is to show and discuss how meaning is produced, criticized, and questioned in Eisenman's projects. It is also important to bear in mind the definitions of architecture which Eisenman promoted, and the distinction he made between building and architecture.

[3] See Sarah M. Whiting's comment on Eisenman's interest in the reading of form and that "architects see, which is not there." In Vladan Djokić and Petar Bojanić, *Peter Eisenman: In Dialogue with Architects and Philosophers*, vol. nr.2, Architecture, (Italia: Mimesis International, 2017). 28

[4] Peter Eisenman, *Houses of cards*, ed. Rosalind Krauss and Manfredo Tafuri (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

In the article “My Ideology is Better than Yours”, published in Architectural Design in 1989, Eisenman took a position which broke with both his previous and following work. Here he emphasized the importance of the practical and pragmatic constraints of building buildings and houses. The article, a transcription of a debate between him and Leon Krier, was presented as a theoretical opposition between tradition (Krier) and the new (Eisenman), but as Eisenman pointed out: “both Leon and I have an ideological position. Leon draws architecture and I have to build it.”[5] The realities of producing buildings was suddenly an important issue for Eisenman, who followed up by presenting the project he was drawing at the time, The Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. In this project he had to deal with an $86 per square foot budget and had to ask himself an almost existential question: “what is it that an architect does?” Eisenman continued: “I’m not saying that $86 is what I want, but right now I’ve got to prove that I’m worth more than $86 a square foot in Columbus, Ohio. I think that’s the task. Not to say I opted out.”[6] This rare case of retreat to the practicalities of building could easily be explained by Eisenman’s desire to build, and he even said that if he did not do the Convention Center, then one would have the undesirable outcome that someone else would do it. Consequently, Krier did not accept that Eisenman had suddenly become a functionalist who just wanted to resolve the program within the limits of the budget. As such, the reliance on the practical constraints was a way for Eisenman to strengthen his position as an architect concerned with the ‘now’, whereas Krier was an architect concerned with the past, and as such promoted a return to classical principles. Both these positions held and hold a theoretical foundation which emphasizes the relationship between form and content. Krier sought to find the timeless and true in this relationship, whereas Eisenman thought this was unattainable and sought continuous change and evolution of architecture.

The continuous development in Eisenman’s career was discussed in the previous chapters, and even if several themes were addressed, there has been a tendency of recurring tactics in many of his projects. Since emphasis is given to the intellectual work of an architect, the design process has been given an obvious primacy by Eisenman. At the same time, he has thoroughly criticized the authorship of an individual architect designing a singular house. This has resulted in an emphasis on the process to show the complex workings of how buildings and elements of buildings attain their meaning. The architect does not have total control in this process and works as a sort of mediator. This has resulted in many diagrams, drawings,

[5] Leon Krier Peter Eisenman, "My Ideology is better than yours" *Architectural Design* 59, no. 10 (1989). 9
[6] Ibid.

and maps for each project, all containing a lot of possible interpretations and meanings. Ultimately, what Eisenman was questioning was the relationship between object and meaning. This means that one must understand Eisenman's architectural projects as answers to how an architect, who does not want to be an author, could write or design architecture to address questions of the autonomy of architecture and what he called architectural meaning.

### 3.2 Cardboard Architecture

In his first houses, the Cardboard Architecture, Eisenman was explicitly searching for the nature of meaning in architecture.[7] This was not done by using symbols or images, but by manipulating the structure of form which affects any meaning. Eisenman wrote: "My premise for undertaking this work is that architectural form is not merely geometric abstractions or a repertory of conventional signs, but in essence a set of archetypal relationships which affect our most basic sensibilities about our environment."[8] Moreover, Eisenman asserted that the primary concern of architecture was, as discussed in the previous chapter, "to produce a new mental image of an environment different from that which we are actually seeing."[9] 'Cardboard' was therefore used to question the nature of our perception of reality and was not only used as a metaphor but said something about the intentions in the project. Since cardboard is often used in architectural models, it "raises the question of the form in relation to the process of design." The question thus became: "is it a building or is it a model."[10] Eisenman's aim was to question scale and deemed it to be an overly human-centric reference. By breaking down the differences between the model and the building this could be avoided. Accordingly, the limitations, possibilities, and workings of the site could be neglected. This resulted in an isolated search for the logic of form.[11]

[7] In a presentation panel with text and drawings for House VI, Eisenman wrote: "This is one of a series of houses which collectively represent for me, a search for the nature of meaning in architecture." Peter Eisenman, *Presentation Panel House VI*, 1970, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Canadian Centre for Architecture archives, Montreal.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Peter Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II" in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings: 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971/2004). 33
[10] Peter Eisenman, "House I" in *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). 15
[11] This is also argued by Sean Keller in: Sean Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

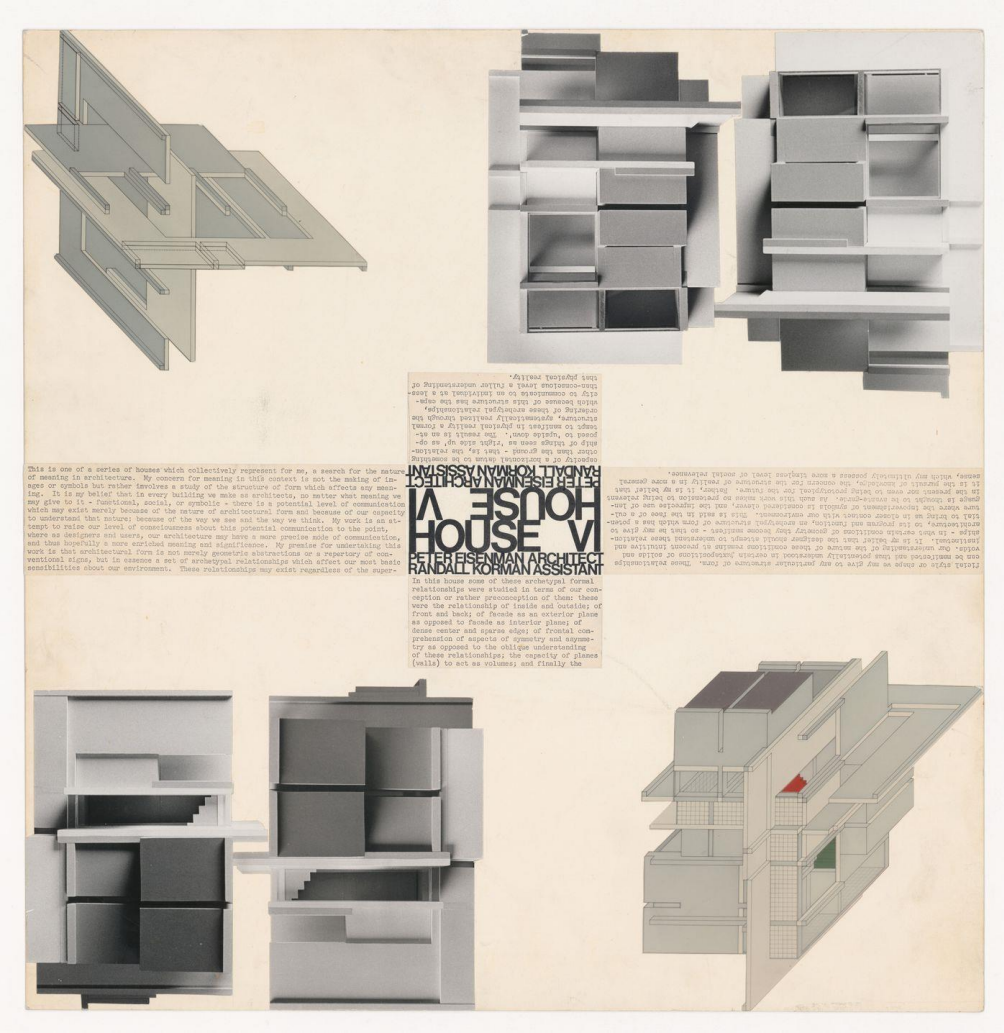


**Fig 3.1** *Presentation panel for House VI*, 1970, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Canadian Centre for Architecture archives, Montreal.

In his first houses Eisenman employed a combination of two themes. First, there was a questioning of the relationship between form and function, and form and meaning, which relates to how the architectural form signifies either function or meaning. Second, there was an exposition of the internal formal structure. As we shall see, both these themes were concerned with meaning, and while in the former Eisenman was criticizing an external social or cultural meaning, in the latter he aimed at affirming the internal architectural meaning. This latter system of internal formal structures was thus an application of the theories Eisenman proposed in his dissertation, where an underlying formal logic provided the ground rules for

architectural form making. The Cardboard Houses were thus examples where a theory of analysis turned into a method of design.[12]

In House I, the Barenholz Pavilion, (fig. 3.2) designed and built between 1968-1969, the central tactic was to over articulate the formal structure.[13] It was introduced to give a more precise understanding of "the nature of the structure of form itself", independent of its function and meaning. This latter meaning is to be understood as the social or cultural external meaning, and not the architectural meaning, which was part of the central formal theme. As Eisenman wrote: "such a conception of design seeks to change the primary intention from the perceptual level to the level of implied meaning."[14] The house was thus supposed to exemplify the deep structure of architectural form and was therefore the first project in which Eisenman searched for the autonomy of architecture. This autonomy was thought to be conceptual and required a reading or interpretation of the building to see and understand the underlying implied formal structure.[15]

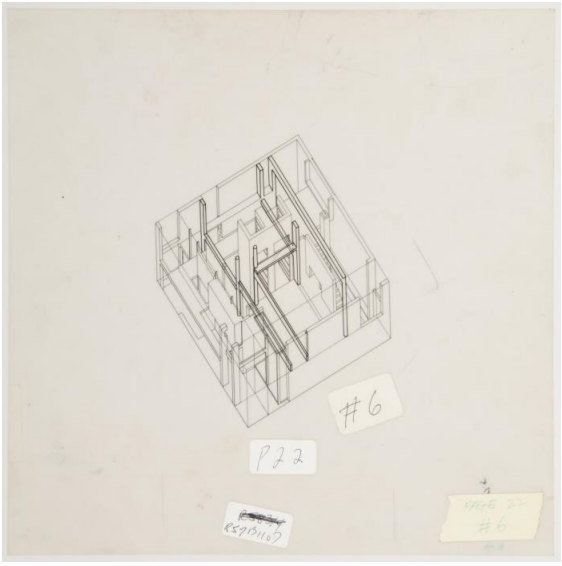


**Fig 3.2.** House 1, Princeton, New Jersey: Exterior axonometric, 1967. Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

[12] Jeremey Till has described this as one of the problems of Eisenman's theoretical approach, which means that there is a problem with architecture theory in general and its relationship to practice. See Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). 21
[13] Eisenman, "Cardboard Architecture: House I and House II." 31
[14] Ibid. 32
[15] Ibid. 33

Years later, in "Misreading Peter Eisenman", (1987) Eisenman classified his earliest houses (I-VI) under the label: *The Idea of the Autonomous Object*.[16] Later, Eisenman argued that autonomy was used in an attempt to "dislocate the metaphysics of architecture," which meant that the houses were supposed to dislocate the traditional symbolism of enclosure and the idea of the house as a home. "The house may once have been a true locus and symbol of nurturing shelter, but in a world of irresolvable anxiety, the meaning and form of shelter must be different."[17] The houses were thus not supposed to symbolize the nostalgic and romantic notion of shelter, because this symbolism was meaningless today. Consequently, Eisenman employed a self-referential symbolism without external reference. In House I he tried to distill the architectural sign by stripping away external meaning and function to reveal or get closer to architecture's own objecthood. Beams emerged from walls and beneath glass, ending in but not resting on columns, so that it was apparent that they were only supporting themselves structurally. This in turn suggested that they were purely signifying, and according to Eisenman "they were signs of architecture," since they did not signify structure or any social or cultural meaning.[18] In addition, elements were painted white to give the house a more abstract look, to free it from reality and the meanings that could be read in less abstract materials such as natural wood or cut stone walls. Moreover, the white planes also carried a specific meaning. They were related to the "international style," and were thus less likely to take on new meaning.[19] These inconsistencies are typical of these houses and of Eisenman's later projects because Eisenman sought ambiguous readings and interpretations in order to question meaning. Even if he did not prioritize ambiguity explicitly in House I, it was lurking in the background.

The elements employed in House I were primarily marks of a relationship with a formal structure. This formal structure consisted of two structures which overlayed and interacted: on the one hand it was a structure of planes and volumes, and on the other hand it was a structure of the frontal and oblique. The placement of columns and beams was supposed to mark these formal structures. They were placed intentionally in an "apparently random order". However, the rectilinear columns and beams were placed to be read as a residue of a layering of planes. Different columns were used to mark the intersection of these planes, and these columns were round to avoid the reading of this intersection as the joining

[16] Eisenman, *Houses of cards*.172
[17] Ibid.
[18] ibid. 174
[19] Eisenman, "House I." 16

of two planes. The round form was also employed to prevent an interpretation of the columns as a residue of the corner of a volume. In addition, two columns and a portion of the beams were taken away to mark a diagonal volumetric system, and thus imply that there were two formal systems. This diagonal shift was employed extensively in Eisenman's first projects and gave the projects a wanted formal complexity, especially since primacy was given to neither of these systems and their interaction made them difficult to read as separate, at least when one just looked directly at the physical building. So, according to Eisenman, this understanding relied on separating these two systems in the mind.[20] The house was thus intended to show the relationship between the actual structure and the implied structure, whereby the latter was thought of as "a range of abstract and more universal formal regularities." These regularities were classified in his dissertation as generic form, and included concepts of solid and void, centroidal and linear, planar and volumetric. In turn, these regularities were transformed by formal actions, like shear, compression, and rotation, to produce a specific form. These transformations were marked in a notational system both in House I and the following houses so that this implied "deep structure" of architecture could be read.[21] The positioning of beams, columns and walls was thus marked to produce a new mental image, which was "different from that which we are actually seeing."[22]

In House II, Eisenman had similar ambitions, and they were still about conceiving information derived from the interaction of formal systems. The tactic was slightly changed, but as with House I, the information that was supposed to be conveyed was disturbed by an "overloading of the object with formal references."[23] The design of the house was initiated by defining a squared cubic space, which in turn was divided into a nine square grid, which was marked by a matrix of 16 squared columns. From this starting point, three possible conditions were presented through diagrams: a matrix of 16 columns, a series of four planes, and a series of three volumes seen as solids between the planes. All these conditions referred to the linear, planar, or volumetric coordinates of space, which in the previous house was called "universal formal regularities." From this exposition, Eisenman overlayed the diagrams with the three possible conditions and developed the house through a series of transformations which had a basis in the underlying structure. By introducing a diagonal shift and articulating two squares, one defined by columns, the other by planes, he created a possibility of several readings of

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid. 17
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid. 25

these elements. The columns seen from one side could be read as neutral referents, while seen from the other they could be read as a residue of the planes, which in turn could be seen as neutral referents from one side, and from the other side read as shifted from the plane of the columns. This sort of layering and articulation of different elements was supposed to shift the focus from the physical objects themselves to the "understanding of its relationship to an underlying structure."[24] This "underlying structure" was conceptual, and Eisenman meant to expose the relationship between the real and physical columns, walls and volumes, and the implied line, plane and solid. He explained:

> The deliberate compression of the usually differentiated formal systems – the column system, the wall system, the window system – into an undifferentiated construct, reinforced a condition where it was difficult for these conventional architectural elements to be considered individually as objects; they became merely parts of a total structure of relationships.[25]

Another tactical move was the use of bi-valency, a condition where two marks, notations or weightings had relative equivalence. This was introduced in House II by the employment of two structural systems (not to be understood as the underlying conceptual structure mentioned above), both walls and columns, which were equally sufficient to support the house on its own (fig. 3.3). Consequently, one of the systems had to be a sign of its own lack of function since both were sufficient to fulfill the structural requirements. This structural redundancy was thus based on the relationship between the two systems and was ultimately dependent on a conventional understanding of structure. But according to Eisenman, they also implied a reference to some underlying formal structure since they had to be read as something other than load bearing.

[24] Ibid. 26
[25] Ibid.

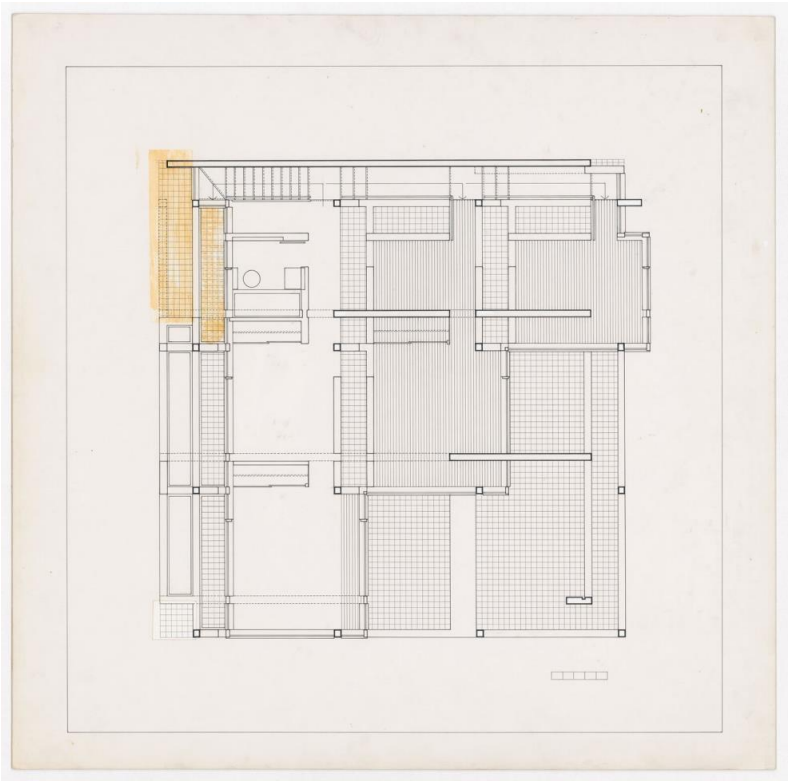

**Fig. 3.3** Upper Floor plan of House II where one can see the "structural bi-valency" of the wall and column systems. 1970, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

House I and House II exemplified Eisenman's belief in the universal formal deep structures in which all the elements and the positioning of these elements was read in relation to these structures. Even if this reading was thought of as a mental process, the generation of the houses was thought of as a process governed by abstract forces outside of the mind. Shifts, rotations, compressions and extensions were applied to the elements of columns, walls, volumes, planes and grids, thereby starting a transformational process based on geometrical rules. The intention was not to reach an ultimate final form presupposed by this transformational process, but rather to make an object where the process was readable. So, when one looked at the "final" building, one could see traces of this transformational process. The platonic character of the generic form explicated in *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* governed this self-generating system of formal relationships, even if the houses

deviated from the generic form. The point was to read this in the houses, but it was not a goal for Eisenman to make this as explicit as possible. The generic ideal was thus something that house I and house II could be analyzed against, and not something that provided the blueprint for the ideal architectural form.

### 3.3 The Conceptual Generation of Form

The design of House III and House IV explicated the same investigations of the "form-meaning relationship."[26] Beams, columns, walls, planes, and volumes were transformed according to applied formal rules, and they were not to be thought of as aesthetic or functioning elements. In House III, two rotated cubes were interconnected to produce different articulations of columns and walls. House IV was even more complex, and the cubic volume, which all these houses had as a starting point, was transformed multiple times. Planes, a grid of columns, and volumes were added to the mix and were put through similar transformational processes. House IV could thus be seen as the extreme version of the Cardboard Houses in which the object was thought to be "designing itself."[27] Consequently, the diagrams and drawings showing this process were more important than the final iteration of the building, and it did not matter that in the end House IV was not built. One of the goals of the house was to "establish a transformational program free from authorial constraints" and thus distance the designing architect from this generative process.[28]

These first houses (I-IV) designed and built between 1967-1971 could be labelled the first cycle of the house series.[29] In these houses the inherent logic of the forms themselves and the transformational rules governing these forms was what K Michael Hays called a search for architecture's *Ursprung*, which was a search for its autonomy, at the expense of any reference to materiality, use and association.[30] Rosalind Krauss made a similar description of the period and called attention to the essential assumptions: "it is ultimately, a way of using object as a lever on reality in order to essentialize a certain part of it. It is a moment of essentialization or reduction back to an ontological absolute."[31]

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[26] Eisenman, "House III", in Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman complete works*. 40
[27] Eisenman, "House IV", in Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman complete works*. 44
[28] Eisenman, *Houses of cards*.177
[29] This is done in: Stefano Corbo, *From Formalism to Weak Form: The Architecture and Philosophy of Peter Eisenman* (Routledge Ltd, 2016). 29
[30] K. Michael Hays, *Architecture's desire: reading the late avant-garde*, Writing architecture series, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010). 52
[31] Rosalind Krauss, "Death of a Hermeneutic Phantom: Materialization of the Sign in the Work of Peter Eisenman" in *Houses of Cards*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 166

As discussed in the previous chapters, Eisenman's belief in this kind of universal basis for architecture diminished during this period, and one could see it in the developments in the design of each of the houses. By House IV the process in itself had become more important than the relation between the house and its assumed essential form or essential transformational rules. For Eisenman, the architectural meaning that was supposed to lie in these rules was in the following years open to the same critique as the cultural and social meaning that he was criticizing with these houses. Mario Gandelsonas classified Eisenman's projects as "the generation of form as a specific manipulation of meaning within a culture."[32] Accordingly, architectural meaning was included in this totality, and the relationship between form and meaning, whether it be cultural meaning or architectural meaning, was equally questioned by Eisenman's architecture. He wrote in *Houses of Cards*:

> The essence of the problem lies in the proposition of autonomy, which in these early houses, operated as a goal a priori and uncritically. In retrospect, autonomy, that is, the condition in which architectural meaning exists solely in the object, in and of itself, can be seen as a concept which participates in the very metaphysics to be displaced.[33]

This meant that the search for an architecture of itself rested on a belief in "the ultimate authority of man's knowledge," which Eisenman could not attain. Since architecture had to be distinguished from sculpture or mere geometry, it relied on some of the aspects which Eisenman wanted to exempt from the equation. So, "to make something conceptual in architecture would require taking the pragmatic and functional aspects and placing them in a conceptual matrix."[34] This did not mean that the meaning of architecture was suddenly defined by the functional aspects, but rather that these aspects participated in the total equation, as Eisenman put it: "their primary existence is no longer interpreted from the physical fact of being a bathroom or closet, but rather the functional aspects of bathroom or closet becomes secondary to some primary reading as a notation in a conceptual context."[35]

[32] Mario Gandelsonas, "On Reading Architecture" *Progressive Architecture* 53, no. 8 (1972).
[33] Eisenman, *Houses of cards*. 181
[34] Peter Eisenman, "Notes on Conceptual Architecture: Towards a Definition" in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971/2004).
[35] Ibid.

### 3.4 House VI

In the first houses, the process depicted by the many axonometric diagrams and drawings was supposed to make the relationship between the specific actual building and the implied formal logic and transformational process more readable. By the mid-1970s, this readability was replaced by an increasing ambiguity. House VI (fig.3.1) and House X (fig. 3.4) are worth presenting in this regard. With House VI (completed in 1975), which initiated the second cycle of houses, Eisenman addressed a whole range of "hidden but value-laden object conditions."[36] These conditions, such as the priority of product over process or the "Euclidian perceptual mode" over other "possible intrinsic geometries," were thrown into question. House VI, a house for Suzanne and Richard Frank, was, according to Eisenman, a turning point in his career. Contrary to his previous houses, House VI was more questioning than affirming, and instead of emphasizing the relationship between the perceptual and the conceptual systems, the effort was made to dislocate this relationship.[37] This resulted in a resistance to conventions, making it apparent that previously believed "truths" were preconceived biases open for revision.

In House VI, Eisenman studied archetypal formal relationships with the intention to pursue knowledge. His concern was to question "the structure of reality in a more general sense, which may ultimately possess a more timeless level of social relevance."[38] This meant questioning the relationship between inside and outside, of front and back, of the façade as the exterior plane opposed to the interior plane, of frontal comprehension of symmetry opposed to the oblique comprehension, of planes as volumes, and the capacity of the horizontal datum to be something other than the ground. These relationships were all examples of preconceived archetypes that Eisenman wanted to dislocate.[39]

Contrary to houses I through IV, in House VI, Eisenman sought to detach the physical perceptual experience from the conceptual experience. In the previous houses he wanted the spectators or visitors to connect the perceptual and conceptual experience to produce a new mental landscape by looking at the building. Conversely, in House VI, the conceptual understanding of the house was supposed to create the physical or perceptual experience.[40] Therefore, Eisenman relied on the abilities of the mind to rearrange certain elements to their

[36] Houses of cards. Eisenman, *Houses of cards*.178
[37] Ibid.
[38] Eisenman, Presentation Panel House VI.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Peter Eisenman, "House VI" *Progressive Architecture* 58, no. 6 (1977). 59

"proper" position. This was triggered by the shape, size, and position of these elements, which in turn "produces within the mind a sense of a tension or a compression in a particular space that is not created through the juxtaposition of real walls but is instead in our conception of their potential location."[41] Later, in a comment about House VI in "Misreading Peter Eisenman", Eisenman said that there was an effort to "create a perceptual system dislocated and operating separately from the conceptual system", which meant that it emphasized how it was interpreted and how it was seen as two distinct relationships between man and object.[42]

House VI was a record of a process which was intended to show the "range of potential manipulations latent in the nature of architecture."[43] Two juxtaposed sets of axonometric drawings explained this process and displayed how planes were transformed into volumes. The drawings on the left showed the development of the actual house, while the drawings on the right showed the notational markings with coded colors. The starting point was two intersecting sets of parallel planes which were transformed by a diagonal shift. With the addition of further planes, columns, solids, and voids, the house was transformed and given its spatial organization. These transformations recall the diagrams of House I-IV, but the markings were "representing only itself and its reciprocal transformation about a diagonal axis" and were not pointing to the ideal formal structure.

More important was the relation between function and the spatial result of these formal transformations. The conventions of residential living were disturbed by the placement of the elements in the house. For instance, a column split the dining table and there was a gap in the master bedroom (if one could call it that), making it impossible to have a shared double-bed. Two sets of stairs, one colored red in the ceiling, the other colored green on the floor, suggested that the building could be flipped over, which thus questioned the idea of a right side up and a wrong side down. In addition, there was an intention to push the facades to the center of the house to question the relationship between inside and outside. What these elements show is that Eisenman needed the conventions, archetypes, and cultural references to provoke an ambiguous reading of the house. The clients, the Franks, subscribed to the difficulties of the house, but also to its ability to "awaken their intellectual curiosity", which in turn made it worth living in.[44] Consequently, the house proved to be successful in

[41] Ibid.
[42] Peter Eisenman, "Misreading Eisenman" in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988,* ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987/2004). 221
[43] Eisenman, Presentation Panel House VI.
[44] Suzanne Frank, *Peter Eisenman's House VI: The Clients Response* (New York: Watson-Guptil 1994).

provoking the inhabitants to think about architecture differently, or at least that was what they reported in the *House VI: The Clients Response.*

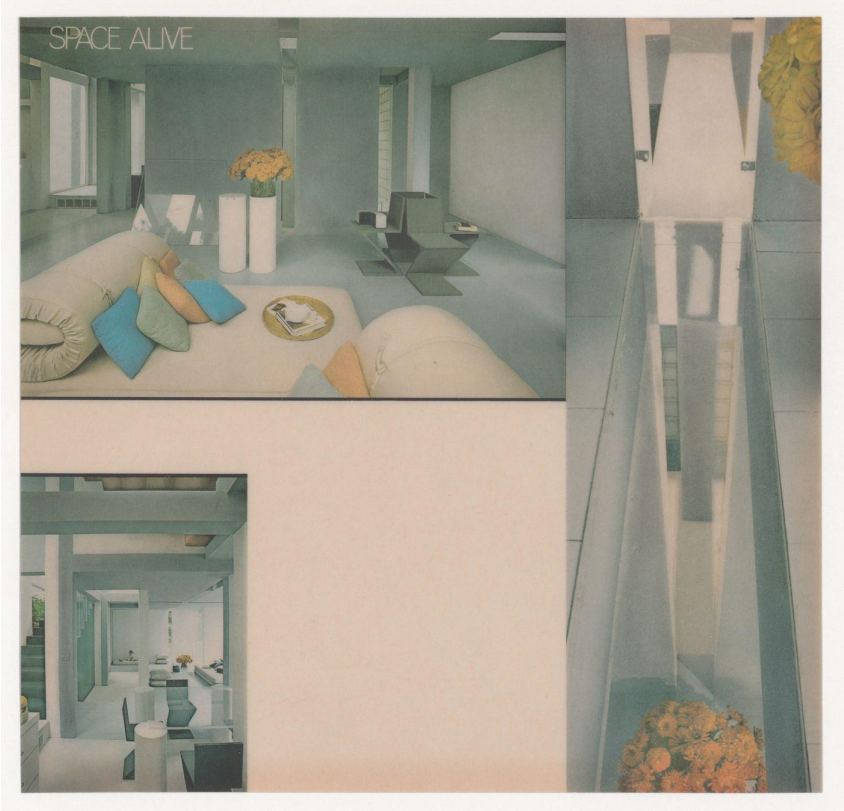


**Fig. 3.4** Interior of House VI, 1977, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

In House VI, Eisenman produced what Sean Keller has called an "irresolvable conceptual ambiguity."[45] For Eisenman, the meaning of the house oscillated between an understanding of the house as an organization of formal elements devoid of functional or pragmatic associations and the understanding of how it breaks with the conventional understanding of both how to read, or look at architecture, and how it should be used and function. The house thus invites people to think about how architecture means, rather than to show the autonomy of architecture. In an article about the house in the New York Times, Paul Goldberger asked rhetorically whether one could remove all cultural references from a

[45] Keller, *Automatic Architecture: Motivating Form After Modernism* 92

house.[46] But the point was not to necessarily to remove these references, but to disturb and displace them to show that the relationship between architecture and meaning was not straightforward. For Eisenman, the belief in an ultimate center, origin, or truth, which was assumed in the search for autonomy in the first houses, was to be thoroughly questioned in the projects to come.

### 3.5 House X

In House X, Eisenman continued to displace conventions, and he even positioned the house as a critique of "houseness".[47] Through a process of disjunction, fragmentation and decomposition, he intended to call into question man's relation to his world. The overarching theme of "House X is rooted in a pervasive and explicit ideological concern with the cultural condition, namely the apparent inability of modern man to sustain any longer a belief in his own rationality and perfectability" .[48] For Eisenman, the house was addressing the same concerns as the rising post-modernism of the time. But by addressing these concerns in a modern and anti-humanist way, the house was distanced from post-modernism. In House X, Eisenman introduced the idea of decomposition which was analogous to deconstruction in literary criticism. As mentioned, the overarching theme in Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist writings was the critique of center and origin. This was based on an acknowledgment that the center requires a periphery, which in turn is to say that there are always two sides of a coin. For instance, a discussion on being always involves a reference to the non-being. This non-being was deemed impossible to refer to without the danger of a paradox because when referring to something, one must attribute something to it, and thus assume that it exists.[49] These sorts of inevitable contradictions in philosophy were handled with two different attitudes: they could either be or should be eliminated, or they were just inevitable, deeply rooted in the core of philosophical thinking.

The decompositional process was supposed to deny the linearity inherent in Eisenman's earlier houses and question the whole process of design. Decomposition proposed a "non-unitary conception of the object" in which there was neither a pre-determined or

[46] Paul Goldberger, "The House as Sculptural Object " *New York Times* (New York), March 20 1977. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1977/03/20/archives/design-the-house-as-sculptural-object.html
[47] Peter EIsenman, *House X* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983). 34
[48] Ibid.
[49] Barry Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction*, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks, (New York: Routledge, 2006). 19

predictable result, nor a causal relationship of one step to the other in the process.[50] However, Eisenman still displayed a belief in "pre-existant" strategies of formal development. Therefore, the design of House X was thought to uncover these hidden, or unavailable pre-existent forms. What the house supposedly did was to return the object to a condition of primacy and move process and meaning (both architectural and social/cultural) further down in the hierarchy. Eisenman tried to get House X into a condition of what he called "pure being", even if it was inevitable that meanings and signification were ascribed to the object, which thus shows the impossibility of this "pure being" free from all meaning and signification.

The presentation and explanation for House X took the form of a dialogue between a voice of a "critic" and the voice of "the architect," both written by Eisenman. "The critic" asked if it was possible to make architecture devoid of any predispositions since the problems of shelter, gravity, entry etc. had to be solved, and that any solution had to take some form which indicated a preferred style. For instance, a flat roof will hint at modernist architecture and a rectilinear column will always be in opposition to a round one. Preference and stylistic choices were therefore inevitable, and "the critic" made the point that these were present in the first houses. "The architect" in his reply, affirmed that all architecture must look like architecture, but that the intention in House X was precisely to be a critique of the previous houses, which meant that the house was a critique of the "forms of the Modern Movement orthodoxy" .[51] Accordingly, in House X there was a search for new forms which did not contain any allusion to known and familiar forms, which meant that any preconceived assumptions about how the forms were produced or seen was thoroughly questioned. The form of the house could not "look like" the logical result of a transformational process based on formal rules, so the process had to be thought of as inconsistent, non-corresponding and illogical. However, to call something inconsistent, non-corresponding and illogical, one needs consistency, correspondence, and logic. The process was thus to be thought of as a process which in turn ended in an object where paradoxically, "the possibility of confirming the expectation of unity or stability, and the denial of such an expectation, be present".[52]

House X was initially conceived as a juxtaposition of four squares represented in two-dimensional plan-drawings. Two different arrangements, or base conditions of these four squares, were intended to make a conceptual disjunction since the resulting form of the house

[50] EIsenman, *House X*. 38
[51] Ibid. 44
[52] Ibid. 48

could refer to both these conditions. But, as Eisenman wrote about the process: "it will be only a series of traces which refer in a sense forward to a more complex and incomplete structure rather than backward to a unitary, simple, and stable structure".[53] Consequently, it is unclear whether the reference to the base conditions was of any importance, or if it was merely a way of starting a process. Eisenman claimed that the specific arrangements of the squares and the subsequent extrusion into *el-shapes* and not platonic cubes in the three-dimensional space were simply analogical heuristic devices. This meant that development of the house was not predictable from the starting point and was thought to be discovered during the process. In addition, the *el-shapes* approximated a set of opposing conditions, like volume and plane, solid and void, point and cube, or drawing and model. The *el-shape* thus contained both sides in opposition and any reading of the shape would therefore contain both. This was like Derrida's critique of binaries and the subsequent questioning of the metaphysics of presence, which always contained absence.

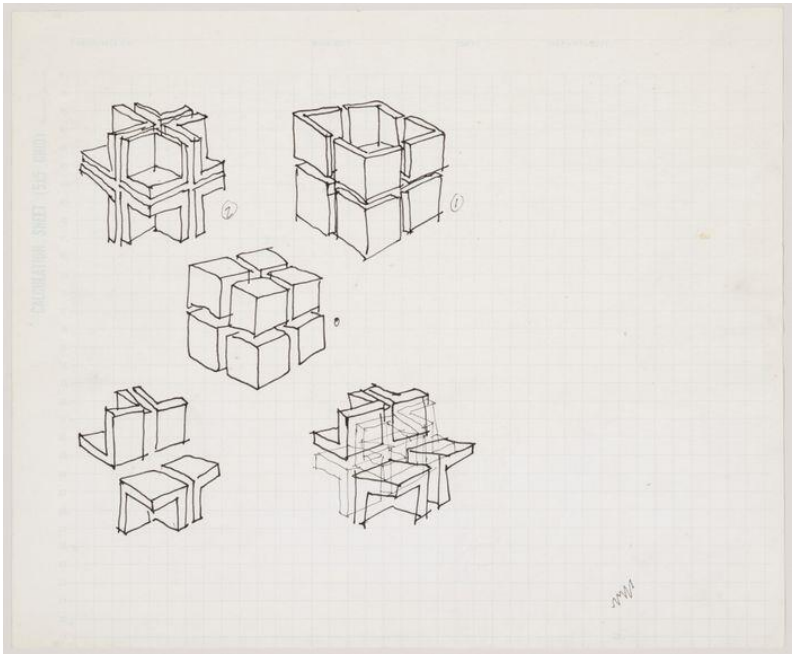

**Fig. 3.5** "Topological diagrams" of a cube, process drawing for House X. 1975. Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

[53] Ibid. 52

Regardless of the changed approach, for Eisenman, it was the conventional meanings of architectural elements which fueled the explanations of House X. In the previous houses there was a critique of the conventional understanding of form as determined by function. The result was thus that form determined form. In House X, neither form, the transformational formal process, nor function could determine the resulting shape of the house. The four *el-shapes* were in a "conceptual state of fragmentation", which suggested that there was no unitary determinant of form. The differentiation between the quadrants, both in size, shape, material, and positioning along a horizontal line, together with interlocking and overlapping of these shapes, formed a complex structure without hierarchy or wholeness.

In the description House X, it was acknowledged that most houses are both structurally and metaphorically vertebrate. In addition, "they have a center, usually a hearth or a stair; their roofs pitch from the center, and their construction exhibits a concern for an overall centrality. The center expresses both the functional core and conceptual unity of the house. In House X, the center is nothing".[54] Eisenman was thus trying to avoid any representational elements in order to produce a "conceptual distance between man and object". The vertebrate, as a metaphor for man's upright position, was avoided by having no linear elements such as columns or beams. Instead, solid vertical and horizontal surfaces covered the linear elements. This is just an example of how House X tried to displace both its cultural, social, and architectural meanings. The house grew out of Eisenman's post-functionalist position, which was a critique of the anthropocentric measure of architecture. Hence, its signification and meaning were supposed to be displaced.

House X became a model for the following projects for Eisenman, both House 11a, House El Even Odd, and the Fin d'Ou T Hou S, were produced by similar decompositional methods, which paved the way for deconstruction in architecture. With House X, similar to House VI, Eisenman acknowledged that cultural and social meanings could not be totally removed from the architectural object, so they were just added to the mix. By questioning these meanings rather than removing them, Eisenman could get closer to examining the hidden ways "man," or simply human beings, conceptualized architecture.[55] The understanding of architecture, which was the main goal of the first houses, was turned in House X into a misunderstanding. The point was still to didactically show how the relationship between the actual, real form of the house and the conceptual understanding of it

[54] Eisenman, "House X," in Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman : Peter Eisenman complete works*.
[55] Eisenman, "Transformations, Decomposition, and Critiques: House X," In House X, 160

works, and as Eisenman explained: “while our perceptual mechanisms seem conditioned to search for a whole, coherent conception, struggling to ‘unlock’ by the secrets of House X some mental addition or subtraction, each time something fits together in space something else falls apart”.[56] Since it was an architecture relying on interpretation and reading, meaning, both social/cultural and architectural, was the central theme. The point, however, was to show that any reading was tainted, ambiguous and one of many possible.

As a final note on House X, it is worth mentioning the model made in the final stages of the design after the client dropped the project. It is an axonometric model (Fig. 3.5) intended to be viewed from a specific angle so that it is seen as an axonometric drawing. From any other angle it is warped and distorted, and it appears to be in a state between drawing and model. Robin Evans called this axonometric model the only true transformation in the mathematical sense of the word.[57] Eisenman did not call it a transformation, but Evans nevertheless claimed that in the model the relation between drawing and object was altered, and this was a proper transformation since no new elements were added or removed. The model was thus a proper ambiguous object and was seen as “the ultimate reality of the work, a final statement of the autonomy of the object and the heuristic and approximate nature of the process”.[58] It was a model with a “conceptual essence” as an axonometric drawing, and since the photograph was depicting the model as this drawing there was no true reality for the model.

[56] Ibid. 160
[57] Robin Evans, “Not made for Wrapping purposes.” AA files, p. 70
[58] Eisenman, House X,

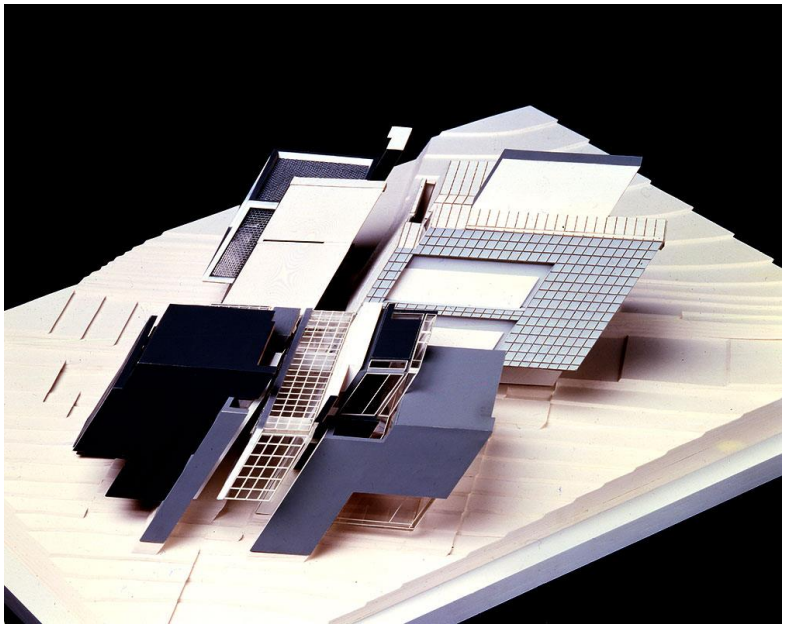

**Fig. 3.6** Axonometric model of House X, 1975, Eisenman architects

Even if Eisenman's first works had different ambitions and intentions, they were all part of a project of decomposition, and were ultimately based on a critique of architectural conventions. As K. Michael Hays described them: "We have been taught to think of this as "mere" formalism. But in House I through House VI (1969-1972), Eisenman follows the modernist strategies of distancing, defamiliarization, and deployment of an alienation effect to reorient our apprehension of architectural form away from standard perceptual conventions."[59] This design process was, according to Hays, a self-conscious exposition of the ways in which architecture traditionally represented the human body, traditional or indigenous constructions, or the classical system of meaning. Since we as viewers are drawn to the act of representing, where the referent "stands before and external to the architectural sign," one needed projects which made this process apparent.[60] For Hays there was a belief in another ambition for architecture, a way to get past this external representation. The ambition was for architecture to achieve attention for "how the particular object has been conceived and constructed, from what kind of position and with what end in view." Hays emphasizes that through strategies of defamiliarization, Eisenman's architecture included mechanisms of representation and the productional process of the object. This was part of the content of the

[59] K. Michael Hays, *Architecture's Desire: Reading the Late Avant Garde*, 54
[60] Ibid.

work, which in turn encouraged the viewer to reflect critically on these constitutional processes. Therefore, the perception of a work of architecture was a necessary reading and interpretation, whereby one tries to make sense of the perceptual conventions and disciplinary institutions a work activates and repeats.[61] With this view, which is held by both Eisenman and Hays, one assumes that any perception is always already a reading tainted by conventions. Consequently, the task of the architect is to make an architectural object which underscore a precipitation of conformity to conventions and institutions. As discussed in the previous chapters, the ontology and meaning of architecture is not explicitly defined in Eisenman's work, but the emphasis on interpretation and reading has put ideas, content and concepts at the forefront of architectural production, and it is the limits of these interpretations that is exposed in Eisenman's architecture from House X and onwards.

### 3.6 Cities of Artificial Excavations

In the projects that Eisenman called the Cities of Artificial Excavations, he further developed the process of questioning architecture and architectural meaning. With House X, there was an inclusion of more external content, and this was further expanded in the projects to come. The aim was to merge many meanings, showing that none prevailed.[62] With the process of artificial excavation Eisenman was, contrary to the projects in the House series, more concerned with the site and context in which the projects were situated. The tactics which Eisenman employed were supposed to provide many textual layers, so that a "close reading" of these projects could occur. This was enabled by a superpositioning of different maps and plans and the scaling and grafting of previous forms and artificial figures. The first of these projects was a design for the Cannaregio town square in Venice, designed in an invited international competition in 1978. The following description and explanation for the project was called "Three texts for Venice, Cannaregio", and emphasized three "textual" layers which questioned, 1: the nostalgia of a future modernism, 2: the nostalgia of the past postmodernism, and 3: nostalgia of a present contextualism.[63]

So, how did Eisenman make these three "texts" apparent in the project? In the first, Le Corbusier's gridded plan for an unbuilt hospital was "superimposed" over the whole site (Fig. 3.7.) The grid was articulated as a series of holes which both indicated possible sites for future

[61] Ibid. 59
[62] Jean-François Bédard, Alan Balfour, and Architecture Canadian Centre for, *Cities of artificial excavation : the work of Peter Eisenman, 1978-1988* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1994). 47
[63] Ibid, 48

houses or future graves, and thus "embody the emptiness of rationality".[64] The voids in the grid acted as metaphors for "man's displacement from his position as the centered instrument of measure". Architecture was therefore supposed to become the measure of itself.[65] The use of Le Corbusier's hospital was also symbolic of modernism's ideology. The second text was supposed to question the present and consisted of several constructed *el-shaped* objects. These objects were variations of Eisenman's House 11a, and appeared to be part of the existing context, but on closer examination they contained nothing. According to Eisenman, this removed the *el-shapes* from the context, leaving just a trace of a former attachment to the context. Here, the influence of Derrida was especially apparent since "their presence was nothing but an absence".[66] This second text also contained another set of objects, which had the form of a house, but in three different scales, one larger than a house, one with the same size as a house, and one larger than a house. These different scales were supposed to question how we "possess objects in terms of their physical presence, but even in the way they are named."[67] Since the objects had the same form, but different sizes, it meant that they could not all be named "house," so the open question Eisenman asked was: "which one is the "correct" size; which one is the real object?" Since the two largest objects contained the smaller ones, like a Russian doll, it was not clear whether the smallest object was the real one, and the larger merely containers of the small object. However, the point was just to make the point and question the "limits of architecture in terms of their scale and naming."[68]

[64] Peter Eisenman, "Three Texts for Venice" *Domus*, no. 611 (1980).
[65] From the project description in Peter Eisenman, *Eisenman Architecs: Selected and Current Works*, Master Architecture Series, (Shanghai: Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd, 1999). 52
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

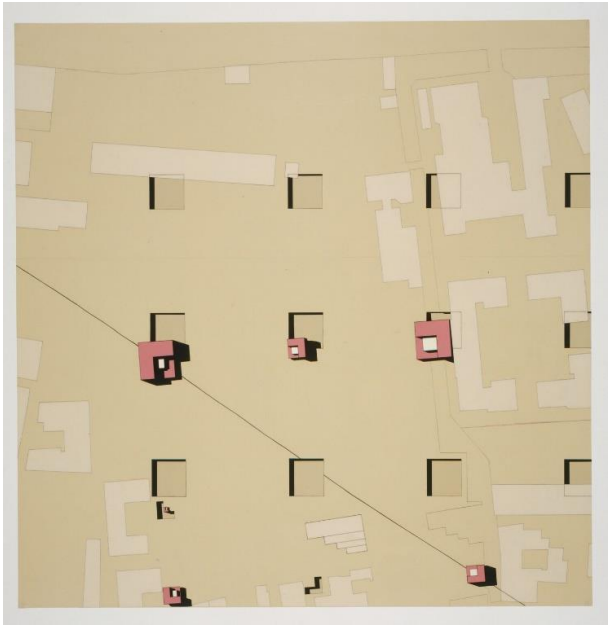

**Fig. 3.7** Site plan for Cannaregio with the grid of holes and the *el-shaped* structures, 1978, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

The third "text", labeled "the emptiness of the past", was constructed as a diagonal line in the ground, cutting across the whole site of the project. According to Eisenman "this line is the topological axis of symmetry for the objects and a physical cut in the surface of the earth."[69] With its topological characteristics, the surface was folded up along the diagonal. Eisenman imposed a topological geometry to suggest "a different relationship of man to objects and to the world of objects."[70] Since the world was no longer anthropocentric, anthropomorphic, or vertebrate, it required new forms and a new geometry, something that was other than the "grid city" or "the medieval city" because they were made with traditional approaches to urban planning. The three alternatives of these traditional approaches were first, as the historical and physical context, second, as a grid, and third, as an object. But as Eisenman suggested:

> It may be possible, to posit a fourth alternative based on topological geometry. The city is seen as the locus of a multiplicity of fragments, the residue of a decomposition from a more

[69] Ibid.
[70] Peter Eisenman, Notes and Sketches on Topological Geometry for Cannaregio, 1978, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Center for Architecture, CCA Archive, Montreal

> complex state of being. The relationship created by topological symmetries – in which the measure of scale and distance is no longer meaningful, but only position relative to some axis – are used as heuristic devices to suggest this decompositional state. They provide an infrastructure which neither accepts nor rejects any other one. It simply exists side by side in a non-whole state, mute and incommunicative with respect to what is around it or invades it, yet silently articulate. It can be said to be intransitive.[71]

As such, the topological axis suggested the unconscious or the shadow of memory. Another feature which alluded to the past was that the model was painted gold. Here Eisenman evokes the story of the philosopher Giordano Bruno, who was arrested in Venice in 1591 and was burned on a stake in Rome in 1600 for his practice, which Eisenman calls the practice of memory.[72] The gold-painted model thus "symbolizes the mysticism of the alchemist."[73] The objects of the second text were also painted red to "symbolize the martyrdom of Bruno." The colors were thought to "remind us of the irrationality of a Venice in 1600 turned against the act of memory."

Variations of the strategies employed in Cannaregio were used by Eisenman in many of the forthcoming projects. The inventions of contexts and sites, the superpositioning, scaling and grafting of different elements was applied to question the normal associational meanings, the nature of scale, the nature of context, and "the relationship of building or non-building, non-elements to the present post-nuclear, post-psychological condition of man."[74] This questioning was not, as discussed in the previous chapter, initiated by the desire for a complete paradigm shift where one set of norms, conventions and meanings were replaced by others. The questioning was rather a way to open up, or to suggest that meaning was not unequivocal. It was like Robert Venturi's "both-and" rather than "either-or". For instance, in the IBA housing project (1981-1985) at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, Eisenman was "both making and unmaking previous hierarchies through a process of artificial excavation."[75] Two strategies was used to construct the site. The first was to expose the history and memory of the site, and the second was to acknowledge that Berlin was "the crossroads of every-place

[71] Peter Eisenman, Notes and Sketches About Urban Planning in Cannergio, 1978, Peter Eisenman fonds, Canadian Center for Architecture, CCA Archive, Montreal

[72] Even if there is no reference to it by Eisenman, in Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory*, first published in 1966, Giordano Bruno's art of memory are presented as an occult and spiritual art. See Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory (Selected Works of Frances Yates)*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 199-204

[73] Ibid.

[74] Peter Eisenman, "Site: The Meaning of Place in Art and Architecture" *Design Quarterly*, no. 122 (1983).16

[75] Peter Eisenman, The project description of the IBA Berlin housing Check Point Charlie, Peter Eisenman, "IBA Social Housing." At: https://eisenmanarchitects.com/IBA-Social-Housing-1985, Accessed 20.08.2021

and no-place". With this "both-and" strategy Eisenman suggested that the project both "memorialized" the place and denied the efficacy of that memory so that anti-memory and memory could work in opposition, to "produce a frozen fragment of no past and no future".[76] The project originally comprised the whole block, but only the building on the south-west corner eventually got built. However, the main form giving strategy was the superimpositioning of different grids to produce a set of walls in the whole block.[77] The absent city walls from the eighteenth century, the foundation walls of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century city grid, together with the Berlin wall and the walls of the existing buildings formed a "composite datum of memory." Over these historical walls, Eisenman superimposed the artificial or what he called "neutral" walls generated by the Mercator grid, which begun "to erase the physical presence of the historical walls." All these different walls and grids was extruded in different heights from the ground so that the ground became a "figure of its own history." As Eisenman put it: "formerly man walked on the ground; now he walks on the walls",[78] which one literally was supposed to do in an IBA project. Consequently, the physical and symbolic presence of the Berlin wall was reduced.

The project in Cannaregio and the project in Berlin required substantial knowledge about the context and aims of the projects in order to understand them. The inventions of the sites with both historical and arbitrary elements contributed to this requirement, and the question which arises is if this really is apparent in the executed projects. The grids, which made irregular lines, shapes, and patterns on the façade of the IBA housing project, did not by definition connote nineteenth century walls, the old city grid, or the Mercator grid, but they did "signify a condition outside of service", which Eisenman stated as a core goal for architecture at this moment in his career.[79] The patterns on the façade were supposed to transform the capacity of the façade to be functional and contain something else. But since this something else was about the historical memory of site, it had to be known before looking at the façade. This is like the necessity of knowing about the conventions of architectural signification that Eisenman relied on in his earlier houses. However, the knowledge one needed was expanded to the site and the external context in the projects of artificial excavation.

[76] Ibid.
[77] Peter Eisenman, Plan for IBA Social Housing, Berlin, 1981, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Center for Architecture, CCA Archive, Montreal
[78] Ibid.
[79] Eisenman, "Site: The Meaning of Place in Art and Architecture."

The template that Eisenman established with the superimpositioning of maps, grids, forms and shapes from the site provided a multiplicity of meanings to the architectural projects to come. The Wexner center for the Arts (1983-1989) in Columbus Ohio was, for instance, an intersection of two grids, the city grid and the university campus grid, thus connecting the campus with the city. In addition, a fractured version of a brick turret was constructed as a reference to the old Ohio State University Armory. All these elements participated in infusing his projects with a multiplicity of meanings that could be read and interpreted. Often, these projects were explained and generated by diagrams, which according to Eisenman expressed the relationships in an architectural object without being isomorphic with it.[80] With the employment of "outside texts" these projects of architectural excavations showed the increasing influence of the writings of Jacques Derrida and the belief that everything was text since everything could be read and interpreted. Accordingly, the design of architecture was a sort of writing because one produced architectural text imbued with fictional elements.[81] These elements contributed to the conceptualization of both objects and site, and Eisenman became more content to play with in the displacement of meaning and signification.

### 3.7 Deconstructivist Architecture

The critique of center and the multiple layers of meaning invoked in House X and in the projects of artificial excavation were influenced by Derrida and his theories of deconstruction. Eisenman used the terms 'writing' and 'text' in the explanations of these projects, and during the 1980s the presence of Derrida in architectural projects became more prominent. However, when the popularity of deconstruction peaked in the Deconstructivist Architecture exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1988, the influence of Derrida was downplayed by Mark Wigley in favor of a stylistic similarity with Russian constructivism and a similar formal likeness between the exhibited projects.[82] But for Eisenman, Derrida was important, which is

[80] Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, 1.

[81] See, for instance, the description of the Romeo and Juliet Project where Romeo's Castle and Juliet's House are transposed on a historical site in Verona. Peter Eisenman and Association Architectural, *Moving arrows, eros and other errors : an architecture of absence*, vol. 3, Box, (London: AA Publ., 1986).

[82] See: Philip Johnson, Mark Wigley, and Art Museum of Modern, *Deconstructivist architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988). See also the publication for the Deconstructivist architecture symposium at Tate in London: Andreas Papadakis, ed., *Deconstruction in Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1988). See also the series of articles published by Dezeen on Deconstructivist architecture. Most notably: Amy Frearson, "Peter Eisenman is the Deconstructivist theorist," *Dezeen* 2022, https://www.dezeen.com/2022/05/04/peter-eisenman-deconstructivist-architect/.

best exemplified by their collaboration for a garden in Bernhard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette in Paris. The unbuilt project is one of the most difficult to assess and discuss since its explanations were published as transcripts of conversations between Derrida, Eisenman, and occasionally including Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leeser. These conversations move in unpredictable directions that are difficult to follow, which in turn provides the basis for the process. As with the previously described projects, the aim was to provide an undecidability of meaning and infuse the project with different layers, historical allusions, and traces which supported this desire.

At first glance, one of Derrida's most relevant writings for architecture was a discussion of Plato's use of the Greek word *Chora*, which is commonly translated as "space" or "place". The uncertainties about the interpretation of the term in Plato made it intriguing for Derrida since he understood the term to refer to a "third" kind of being that was neither unchangeable and invisible nor changing and visible, but a kind of receptacle, space, or place.[83] *Chora* was a third nature existing between the idea and the image or between the sensible and intelligible. It was precisely this otherness that made it interesting for Derrida. Since *Chora* was a kind of ambiguous *non-being* supporting *being*, it was open for the deconstructive method. Derrida described this singularly unique place to the architects in *Chora L Works*:

> In Greek, *chora* means "place" in very different senses: place in general, the residence, the habitation, the place where we live, the country. It has to do with interval; it is what you open to "give" place to things, or when you open something for things to take place.[84]

Derrida continued to summarize the term as being something which is not simply platonic, neither the eternal ideas nor their visible copies, but something that is irreducible to everything that makes Plato's philosophy coherent. *Chora* was for Derrida the "spacing which is the condition for everything to take place."[85] The term being a sort of oscillation between oscillations, creating an endless spiral of irreducibility. For Derrida, *Chora* had no origin and, in its inessentiality, refuted the binary workings of the intelligible and sensible postulated by Plato, but at the same time it provided Derrida with a sort of mystic overarching undefinable

[83] This is presented in Plato, *Timaeus*, section 51a, See: Robin Waterfield (trans.), *Timaeus and Critias* (with introduction and notes by A. Gregory), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
[84] Jacques Derrida, "Khora" in *Chora L Works*, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1997).15
[85] Ibid.

concept which could be used to understand what "philosophy cannot speak philosophically about."[86] The question for us is how this undefinable concept could be applied to architecture.

As mentioned, a good illustration of how Derrida's views were used in architecture is found in the collaboration between Eisenman and Derrida. This was initiated by Bernhard Tschumi in 1985, and the collaboration was supposed to result in a separate garden in Le Parc de la Villette. Even if the project ultimately did not get built, the process was recorded and collected in the book *Chora L Works*, published as late as 1997. This was probably for the benefit of the project, which as we shall see, was more suited to publishing than building. As a starting point for the programming of the project, Eisenman took the idea of *Chora* introduced by Derrida. The project was supposed to show the "presence of the absence of the *Chora*" and to give form to this idea, revealing the tension between the sensible and intellectual.[87] Derrida mentioned that *Chora* could not be represented, or more precisely that it could only be represented negatively, and as Anthony Vidler described, Derrida was troubled by using the term from the beginning.[88] Since the term was only defined using metaphors, and all the subsequent discussions was interpretations of these metaphors, there could be no way of attaining the "correct" meaning of the word. *Chora* was rather to be understood as a structure "situating the situator."

So, how could this ambiguous and undefinable term be used in an architectural project? A layering of three "texts", which in turn provided three sites, was proposed. First, Tschumi's "text" for the Parc de la Villette, which Eisenman interpreted to be a text on his own project for Cannaregio in Venice, second, Derrida's "text", which was the one on *Chora* in Plato's Timaeus, and the third "text" was Eisenman's proposal of the project based on the "registration" and the "misreading" of the other two texts, which in turn produced a spiral.[89] Thus: "Peter Eisenman will not represent anything but the idea of Derrida representing *Chora* as Tschumi representing Eisenman representing Tschumi and so forth." Eisenman confessed that he did not know what kind of physical form this would take and stated that this was where the work had to be done. So, he asked Derrida for suggestions on any formal analogies for his work on *Chora*. But, as Derrida pointed out, *Chora* is "not substantial matter", it is not void, and it is "non-readable", which meant that:

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[86] Ibid. 30

[87] This was discussed in Transcript 1 in Jacques Derrida, *Chora L works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*, ed. Peter Eisenman, Jeffrey Kipnis, and Thomas Leeser (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

[88] See Anthony Vidler, "Nothing to do with Architecture" *Grey Room* no. 21 (2005). 115

[89] Derrida, *Chora L works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*. 33|

> *Chora* cannot be represented in any form, in any architecture. That is why it should not give place to an architecture – that is why it is interesting. What is interesting is that the non-representable space could give the receiver, the visitor, the possibility of thinking about architecture.[90]

This was precisely what Eisenman wanted, a project which had the impossible task of representing an architecture of impossible representation.[91] Since the aim of the project was this desired impossibility, Eisenman and Derrida obviously encountered problems when they had to formalize and draw the physical structures. Because of the layering of the three "texts" and an aversion to any totality or wholeness, it was suggested that the visitors were able to write and erase something into the project.[92] This could be done by using sand or water, but not in a direct way because the direct involvement of the visitors allowed too much participation and not enough dislocation. Consequently, there had to be an analogous way to make this writing and erasing possible.

The project included three sites, a quarry, a palimpsest and a labyrinth, where the visitors were supposed to be moving stones to make an unstable and constantly changing site and structure. Eisenman described it to Derrida:

> The visitor participates in their location as her or she goes from site to site. The first site is a quarry; the second is a palimpsest – you can call it *chora* if you want, but let's stick to palimpsest for the time being – where the superposition of Tschumi's plan for La Villette is read over the archaeology of La Villette. The stones of Eisenman, from the quarry site, are moved to the palimpsest site, where a moved stone both marks itself on the site and is itself marked by what is on the site. When moved again, it leaves a trace of its presence and takes with it the absence of presence of the palimpsest to the third site – the Derrida/Plato site. [93]

All the three sites could be forms of *Chora*, and "the whole thing becomes a mental operation concerning the history of the stones as they are moved by the people from the quarry to form the palimpsest and eventually return to the quarry." This was conceptually clear for both Eisenman and Derrida, but Derrida expressed some concern about how to translate this

[90] Ibid. 35
[91] The dialogue is as follows: PE: "How to think about the impossibility of representing this being" JD: "Of representing, for instance, an architecture of representation, of chora." PE: "exactly". In Ibid. 35
[92] Ibid. 34
[93] Ibid. 46

activity to stones and people. At the end of the process the idea of the quarry where visitors were supposed to participate in the continuous creation of the work was abandoned.

What the transcripts of the conversations between Eisenman, Derrida and the other actors in *Chora L Works* showed was the unpredictable and undecidable features of the project. This makes it difficult to assess the project and its iterations, concepts, and explanations. Arguably, this undecidability was intentional and the elements, layers, forms, and shapes which were either added, removed, or changed contributed to the impossible definition of the project, and consequently the impossible translation of *Chora* into architecture. As Derrida asserted: "Do not worry; it is an impossible paradigm for architecture. It is the challenge in itself that is important."[94] To which Eisenman replied: "We realize that we cannot realize it and that is why the challenge is so great."[95] However, after the first meeting with Eisenman, Derrida had a vision for the shape of the project, and it took the shape of a lyre, which was also a sieve. According to Derrida, and contrary to his previous claims that *Chora* was impossible to represent in a form, in Plato's text, *Chora* was compared to a sieve where things were separated into the world of the sensible and the intellectual.[96] The lyre was a sort of metaphor for the design process being a musical event, the choral work. Eisenman hesitated to include the lyre in the design, but with the superpositioning of other elements, it could be incorporated without being too direct as a metaphor or gimmick. It was thus about "finding a part of the project as it stands and call it a lyre."[97]

Derrida's introduction of the lyre/sieve exemplifies the difficulties with the collaboration. Even if the process was marked by mutual respect, the actors did not necessarily manage to go beyond their roles as either architect or philosopher. Derrida pointed out that he had nothing to contribute to architecture and that he was incompetent. Nevertheless, it was he who was most concerned about the practicalities of the project. This resulted in a dilemma which occurred on several occasions during the design process, and it concerned the question of how to solve practical problems concerning access and safety and still maintain the philosophy in the project. For instance, the placement of railings so that people would not fall into the holes of the gridded structure could not be accepted. Eisenman's concern was that the requirement of a handrail "would destroy everything by framing it into reality." Following this, a discussion ensued about how to make it accessible,

[94] Ibid. 71
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid. 92
[97] Ibid. 93

which disturbed Derrida and required a solution. So, access to the layered and gridded structure had to be from beneath through a kind of basement. In this basement, all the positive features of the surface would be negative and vice versa, as Jeff Kipnis described: "now the amazing thing is not only that it solves the immediate problem, but it also re-engages the poetics of Plato's *Chora* by creating a condition of imprinting by being the negative of itself in itself."[98] This supposedly enriched both the architecture and the philosophy in the project, and addressed the inadequacy of traditional architectural solutions to access and safety.

Ultimately, it was the differences between architecture and philosophy that was especially difficulty to dismantle. The boundaries of the two disciplines were never really breached because both Eisenman and Derrida took their familiar and "centric" roles of architect and philosopher. However, it was Derrida who asked questions about where the benches would be placed and how to include plants and vegetation in the garden. This expressed a "centric" position on architecture since it relied on architectural conventions. Eisenman asserted that his work "always has been about the denial of the traditional architect, the originator architect, the expressionist architect."[99] Similarly, Derrida asserted that his own deconstructionist project was not philosophy, but that it only addressed philosophy from the outside.[100] A telling fact about the project is that despite the intentions that the project was supposed to be a collaborative design work, Derrida's role was later described as providing the theoretical background.[101] He thus gave the project an intellectual veneer, while Eisenman still was the architect. Eisenman expressed that the collaboration with Derrida would transcend the project itself. After agreeing on the title, Choral Works, Eisenman proclaimed: "Now we have everything, you, me, a story and a title." What they lacked, as Derrida pointed out, was the work.

[98] Ibid. 92

[99] Peter Eisenman, "Twisting the Separatrix" in *Chora L Works*, ed. Peter Eisenman Jeffrey Kipnis, Thomas Leeser (New York Monacelli Press, 1997).132

[100] Derrida mentioned in transcript 7 what deconstruction is: "it is a style in questioning philosophy, the origins of philosophy, the limits of philosophy, the axioms of philosophy. But it is not philosophy, or it is not strictly speaking, a philosophical discourse." In: Derrida, *Chora L works : Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*.

[101] See the project description at the web page for Eisenman Architects. "La Vilette."

**Fig. 3.8** Presentation model of second scheme, Project for a garden, Parc de la Villette, Cora L Works, 1986, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

One of Eisenman's ambitions was to turn deconstruction from a mode of analysis into one of synthesis. But in a classic Derridean fashion, this could hardly be achieved because deconstruction was in its essence about the inability to synthesize. Andreas Papadakis also acknowledged this and defined it accordingly: "Deconstruction does not strictly demarcate a framework. Its critique is continual, and it would be useful to remember that deconstruction is above all an activity, an open-ended practice, rather than a method convinced of its own correct reasoning."[102] The project for the garden at La Villette was thus an invention of different sites, texts and relations, and was ultimately a project where the aim was to pursue an architecture where presence and absence were working simultaneously. As such, for

[102] Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke, and Andrew Benjamin, *Deconstruction: omnibus volume* (London: Academy Editions, 1989). 7

Eisenman, it was making a critique of what we take for granted in architecture, the human-centric privileging of presence over absence. “For me, this system of presences represses what I believe you call difference, which requires the simultaneous operation of both presence and absence. If this is the case, then architecture has been one of the arenas in which difference is most repressed.”[103] Derrida was not sure if the focus on absence was entirely necessary. “Well, you can strategically insist on absence as a disruption of the system of presence, but at a certain point you have to leave the theme of absence.”[104] This was also addressed in a letter to Eisenman, in which Derrida suggested that Eisenman might have misunderstood absence or the presence of absence.[105] But Eisenman continued to keep the possibility for absence. Since architecture is and was making a place, meaning that it was a presencing of place, it inevitably cannot be displaced. Eisenman’s doubt was that this might be a myth, “that it is not necessary that architecture remain fixed in place and time as the locus of the metaphysics of presence.”[106]

What the process presented in *Chora L Works* and the influence and collaboration with Derrida suggests, is the pursued impossibility in Eisenman’s overall project. This is apparent in Eisenman’s answer to Derrida’s letter: “I am preoccupied with absence, not voids or glass, because architecture, unlike language, is dominated by presence, by the real existence of the signified.”[107] But the goal for Eisenman is, as discussed in the previous chapters, to “detach the signified from not only its signifier but also from its condition of presence.” For instance, a hole in a plane must be detached from the signifier, a window, but also be detached from giving light to a space, which was its condition of presence, without causing the room to be dark. This seems like an impossible task, which Derrida hinted at in his “conventional” understanding of architecture, but Eisenman insisted that such a task should nevertheless be attempted. He was thus searching for a third way, which was neither in the signifying capacities of architecture, nor in its being.[108] This was just described as something else, or an *aura,* and did attain a kind of mystic character, even if Eisenman was hesitant to define it.

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[103] Derrida, *Chora L works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*. 7

[104] Ibid.

[105] See Jacques Derrida, "A Letter to Peter Eisenman" *Assemblage* 12, no. 12 (1990)., This is also discussed in: John Macarthur, "Experiencing Absence: Eisenman and Derrida, Benjamin and Schwitters" in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995*, ed. Kate Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). 100

[106] Peter Eisenman, "Eisenman's Doubt" *Log*, no. 13/14 (2008), http://www.jstor.org/stable/41765247. 190

[107] Peter Eisenman, "Post/El Cards: A Reply to Jacques Derrida," *Assemblage*, no. 12 (1990), https://doi.org/10.2307/3171114, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3171114., 15

[108] Ibid. 17

This led to continuously new interests and new attempts to displace the connection between architectural form and meaning.

### 3.8 Folding

During the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, Eisenman exhibited a substantial interest in the use of new digital tools as well as science in general both in the production of buildings and as a source for theoretical exploration. Some of his late 1980s projects included scientific processes as sources of inspiration and a continuation of the expansion of external symbolic sources for architectural production. For instance, the design for Biocentrum (1987) in Frankfurt was based on a DNA chain. These projects, like the Biocentrum, the Aronoff Center for the Arts (1988-1996) and the Carnegie Mellon Research Center (1988) showed the analogies Eisenman made between scientific and architectural processes. The form of the buildings was thus developed like specific processes taken from mathematics and physics.[109] Even if this was a new source of inspiration for Eisenman, with new shapes and new deformations, he still relied on "natural" process of formal development.

Central in this exploration was the process of "folding", which derived from an engagement with Gilles Deleuze and his discussions of Gottfried Leibniz and calculus as a modern language of differentially. This was described by Mario Carpo as a continuation of deconstruction with digital means.[110] For Eisenman, "the fold" provided a "new strategy for dislocating vision."[111] With the fold, form was to be conceived both as "continuous and as articulating a possible new relationship between vertical and horizontal, or between figure and ground, thereby braking up the existing cartesian order of space."[112] Folding was for Eisenman a term which could be translated into architecture in order to question the conventional relation between form and meaning and continue the attack on the "metaphysics of presence". The term also marked the introduction of what Eisenman called affect, where he included the subject's experience and sensations of a project, which in turn contributed to a more unstable and open reading. Consequently, the architectural drawings which were supposed to represent shapes and forms in space were deemed unfit to convey the relationship

[109] Bernard Kormoss, "Peter Eisenman: Theories and Practices" (Doctor of Philosopy Technische Universiteit Eindhoven, 2007).
[110] Mario Carpo, *The digital turn in architecture 1992-2012*, AD reader, (Chichester: Wiley, 2013).10
[111] Peter Eisenman, "Folding in Time: The Sngularity of Rebstock" in *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial, Eisenman Architects 1988-1998* ed. Peter Eisenman (New York: Monacelli Press, 2003)., 130. Also published in Peter Eisenman, "Folding in Time: The Singularity of Rebstock" in *Folding in Architecture*, ed. Greg Lynn (New York: Wiley, 1993).
[112] Ibid.

between “real space” and the project drawings.[113] The problem was that there “no longer exists a one-to-one scale correspondence” since one could no longer conceptualize the experience in the “folded” space. Folding was thus a strategy to dislocate vision or to dislocate the relationship between the eye and the mind, making interpretation less important.

In the design for the Alteka Office Tower (1991) in Tokyo Eisenman tried to evade a purely “Cartesian” definition “by not representing an essential form.” The building was instead a “form of becoming” and was developed out from a “folding” of an L-shape, drawn in both plan and section. The object, the building, emerged out of this “folding” and there was no way to read the three-dimensional object from the planimetric projection drawings. Eisenman’s intention was to “dislocate the dialectical distinction between figure and ground,” and to remove meaning from space.[114] Even if the final building is a static object, it is thought of as an event. The temporal modulation that is the process of folding implies that there could be a continual variation, and thus it is a form of becoming. Moreover, the fractured shape of the office tower with different plans for the different stories is the physical result of this becoming and continues Eisenman’s reliance on the process. The design of the Max Reinhardt Haus (1992) in Berlin followed a similar process in which the form was generated from a single Moebius strip with vectors extended into planes. These planes folded in on themselves creating cuts and triangulations between the planes. Eisenman introduced into this process idealized cubic volumes folded into the initial grid. The inspiration for this process was that of a scientific crystalline mutation, and the building received a fragmented character.

In the masterplan for Rebstockpark (1990) in Frankfurt am Main, the concept of the fold was employed together with the superpositioning or projection of grids. Once again, the Mercator grid was projected onto the site together with a grid defined by the perimeters of the site, which fold and unfold to create a new set of lines, which in turn gives form to the building blocks. This folding process turned object into event and provided the project with the possibility of endless variation. However, as with the other buildings produced with the fold as a dominating theme, the masterplan of the Rebstockpark had to be fixed at some point. The question is thus whether the fold mainly worked as a generative concept and was consequently metaphorically represented in the final buildings, or if it pointed to something

[113] Peter Eisenman, "Visions Unfolding: Architecture in the age of Electronic media" in *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012*, ed. Mario Carpo (Chicester: Wiley, 2013). 20. First published: *Domus* no. 734 (January 1992).
[114] Ibid.

else. This latter question also raises the questions about the motivations Eisenman had to invoke the fold.

In *Visions Unfolding: Architecture in the Age of Electronic Media*, Eisenman based his call for a new architecture on the supposed paradigm shift from the mechanical to the electronic, which came to question "the entire nature of what we know as the reality of our world."[115] With the introduction of electronic media in our everyday life, our vision of reality, which always demands interpretation, was supposed to change. Since architecture was traditionally a "bastion" of this reality, it ought to be "greatly transformed". According to Eisenman, in the mechanical paradigm primacy was given to "monocular perspectival vision", which resulted in projection drawings of three-dimensional space on two-dimensional planimetric surfaces.[116] The mechanical paradigm coincided with the anthropocentric, and the monocular perspectival vision thus gave primacy to the human subject. This had been the dominant discourse in architecture since the Renaissance, whereas in art it was challenged. For instance, in cubism the flattened objects on the picture plane could not be assembled to a meaningful perspectival picture, and the viewing subject was thus "deflected". The direct relationship between sight and mind was thus detached. Eisenman thus called for a similar critique of vision in architecture where the relationship between subject and object was not so easily defined. This meant "to allow the subject to have a vision of space that no longer can be put together in the normalizing, classicizing or traditional construct of vision; another space, where in fact the space "look back" at the subject."[117] This meant overcoming traditional representations of function, which was a consistent aim for Eisenman's architecture since his first houses.

In order to make space "look back", Eisenman relied on the assumption that no space is uninscribed, and thus required a rethinking of this inscription. In the Wexner Center, an anomalous column in the staircase was this kind of inscription. A problem was that many spatial inscriptions were a result of design intentions, and that the authorial subjective expression only affirmed the same beliefs about vision as before. Eisenman did not explicitly say that the column at the Wexner Center was a result of subjective design intention, but he nevertheless called for an "outside text" to overcome both expression and the inscription of function.[118] What Eisenman introduced was the Moebius strip, also used in the Max Reinhardt

[115] Ibid. 16
[116] This had according to Eisenman been the paradigm in architecture since Brunelleschi. Ibid. 18
[117] Ibid. 19
[118] Ibid.

House, which was an “unbroken continuity between interior and exterior.” This was in turn linked with Deleuze’s idea of the fold. In Eisenman’s description of folded space, it was something that “denies framing in favor of a temporal modulation”, which had no narrative, linear sequence, and contained the quality of the “unseen”. The unseen was, as discussed before, what Eisenman was searching for throughout his career, and with the influence of Deleuze, this was thought of as more dynamic and complex than earlier in his career.

**Fig. 3.9** The column in the stairs in the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio, 1989, Eisenman Architects

### 3.9 The Virtual House

One of the projects which exemplified both the Deleuzian complexity and the electronic paradigm was the Virtual House (1997). This project addressed the virtual as an alternate reality inspired by the electronically generated cyberspace. However, Eisenman made it clear that the virtual was not merely a simulation of the physicality of architecture, but that "the task here is to produce a discourse on virtuality that avoids the dualistic opposition of virtuality and physicality in favor of a rereading of the virtual as present, yet absent in the physical."[119] With his aversion to binaries initiated with Eisenman's Derridean influence, he positioned the Virtual House as a different way to read form in architecture against the conventional representation of function and meaning. So, the *virtual* worked as a term to give attention to the many possible interpretations a physical form could have and was not opposed to the real, but a part of it. In this sense, the *virtual* is a concept that is like the concept of meaning since it is about how architecture was "acting without physicality". By this it could be inferred that it was about the reading and interpretation of the physical form of a building. This has been central throughout Eisenman's career, but now this reading had become far more complex and open. The virtual was contrasting representation, which was conventional and based on a priori assumptions about the meaning of form. Consequently, the Virtual House, as many of Eisenman's previous projects, was supposed to open up the multiple potential of architectural meaning and show unforeseen connections and relations. Time and memory were invoked and the relations between the present and the past was included in the concept of the virtual where "every present has a virtual trace or 'memory' of the past." But this was obviously not to be understood as the use of references to architectural history, but rather as the virtually contained traces of its own process of becoming. Therefore, the actualization of the virtual was a sort of generation of form and in turn ended in a continuous and self-referential design process.[120]

The complex interrelations of the Virtual House eventually got the form of a scrambled grid, which began as a "memory" of House IV. This was abstracted into nine cubes, which were described as a "potential field of internal relations and connections", each of which was expressed as a vector.[121] Moreover, these vectors or lines were given arbitrary

[119] Ingeborg Rocker Peter Eisenman, "The Virtual: The Unform of Architecture," *ANY: Architecture New York*, no. 19/20: The Virtual House (1997).
[120] "Thus a virtual house can be understood as a continuum with complex and multiple relational interactions and their differentiated and continuous articulation over time." in Peter Eisenman, "The Virtual: The Unform of Architecture." 20
[121] Ibid.

attributes influencing the location, orientation, direction, and repetition in space. The Virtual House got its form by this process where the vectors were connected or changed direction by these "forces". As with the previous projects, there is a problem of making a static building that does not merely represent the continuous virtual becoming. Eisenman expressed this concern himself: "The use of the notion of the virtual in architecture risks literally materializing the immaterial. Therefore, one needs to address the productive making, or the condition of the virtual within architecture, in order to allow architecture to question traditional ideas of form and space."[122] However, the Virtual House still requires a reading whereby the warped and scrambled lines in a three-dimensional grid metaphorically represent the arbitrary continuous becoming. So, to achieve the meaning he wants, Eisenman required a similar conventional understanding, which he initially denied. What influences from both Derrida and Deleuze have made apparent is the difficulty of translating generally ambiguous concepts into an architecture that is static, visual and concrete. This makes the terms like "folding", "becoming", "interstitial", "immanence", "virtual" and "absence" starting points for Eisenman's formal explorations, and they end up by just being metaphorically represented in the projects. This seems to be the case with a new conception of space which Eisenman has tried to make use of in his projects.

### 3.10 Topological Space

In the project for Cannaregio discussed above and several other of Eisenman's projects, there is one aspect which contributes to the complexity of meaning. This was the introduction of a new conception of space, the topological geometry which goes beyond our previous understanding of three-dimensional space. This topology was initially introduced into mathematics to deal with complex geometrical systems and change, and it pertains to the calculation of the distortion of geometrical figures, while they are keeping their qualitative properties such as shape and size. Topology mainly deals with problems on a global opposed to a local level, which means that the non-Euclidian dynamic space is more useful.

Since architecture is mostly a local phenomenon and is static, it is not clear how topology could be applied directly. However, topology has been used in the form giving process, which has contributed to the warped forms and smooth surfaces made possible by the continuous evolution of digital tools.[123] Greg Lynn has in the search and development of

[122] Ibid.

[123] Greg Lynn, "Introduction" in *Folding in Architecture*, ed. Greg Lynn (Chichester: Wiley, 1993). 10

complexity in architecture, for instance, applied terms from non-Euclidian geometry and calculus to have a theoretical foundation for his computer-generated experiments. For Lynn "it is important to imbue digital technologies with some creative and intellectual force that engages the history or architectural problems and ambitions."[124] The work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari did provide this intellectual force, at least for Lynn and for Eisenman. For Deleuze and Guattari, topology represented a heterogenous space that contained multiplicities and was "metric and nonmetric; extensive and qualitative; dimensional and directional; of masses and of packs; of magnitude and of distance; of breaks and of frequency".[125] The problem for Eisenman was to translate this into architecture.

At Cannaregio, as well as in the following projects, the site was conceived as a topological surface, which meant that both building and site was merged and opened to the same form-giving process. As mentioned, one of the tactics that Eisenman borrows from Derrida is the questioning of binary oppositions. At Cannaregio the opposition between figure and ground was questioned by the introduction of a topological geometry because it enabled both figure and ground to be a part of the same continuous surface. Topology thus helped to merge the binary oppositions such as figure/ground, inside/outside, frontal/oblique or solid/void, and could be read as a conceptual device to frame the questioning of these binaries and consider the "other". Since Eisenman always emphasizes the meaning and signification of architecture, it was not necessarily the case that the space of a physical building was topological or heterogenous, but that it could be read or interpreted as such. The point was thus to produce a multiple set of meanings to "destabilize existing forms", making a "heterogenous space that do not support established categorical hierarchies."[126]

So, on the one hand, they are the mathematical consequences for the new conception of space, the geometrical problems it solves, and possibilities enabled by these innovations. On the other hand, there is the belief that architecture should represent the new knowledge and new conception of space.[127] This meant that architecture should not only make use of the

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[124] Ibid.

[125] Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, "The Smooth and the Striated: the Mathematical Model" in *Space Reader: Heterogenous Space in Architecture*, ed. Achim Menges Michael Hensel, Christopher Hight, Ad Space Reader (Chichester: Wiley, 2009).46 Originally a chapter in: Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, Mille plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[126] This is described in: Jeffrey Kipnis, "Towards a New Architecture" in *Space Reader: Heterogenous Space in Architecture*, ed. Achim Menges Michael Hensel, Christopher Hight, Ad Reader (Chichester: Wiley, 2009).99

[127] Eisenman has been claiming that architecture should express its culture and its "cosmology". See Eisenman: Krier Two Ideologies, 33 or Peter Eisenman, "Strong Form, Weak Form" in *Re:working Peter Eisenman* ed. John Honderich Nicola Hodges, Sophie Ovenden (London: Academy group 1993). 51

solutions that topological geometry provides in the design process, but also that the architecture should metaphorically illustrate topological space. The new conceptions of space and the terms Eisenman employed thus both generated new forms and connected architecture to fashionable philosophical and theoretical trends. Moreover, it justified and created limits in the use of new digital tools for formal experimentation.[128] For Eisenman, this meant that architecture had made the transition from a "mechanical" to an "electronic" paradigm.[129]

### 3.11 Code X

At the end of the 1990s and well into the 21st century, Eisenman included many of the tactics that he had developed throughout his career. The overlaying of different grids, shapes, and forms to make a multiplicity of meaning or question conventional signification was still applied. In one of his most well-known projects, The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (1998-2005), he tried to question the fixed idea of nostalgia and memory since the Holocaust could never be understood: "We propose that the time of the monument, its duration, is different from the time of human experience and understanding." [130] This was done through a questioning of stability.

> The project manifests the instability inherent in what seems to be a system, here a rational grid, and its potential for dissolution in time. When a rational system grows to large and out of proportion to its intended purpose, it loses touch with human reason. It begins to reveal the innate disturbances and potential for chaos in all systems of seeming order, the idea that all closed systems of a closed order are bound to fail.[131]

The arrangement of 2700 pillars in a grid with a difference in the top and ground plane determined by the intersections of the voids in the grid of pillars and the grid lines of the site is supposed to provide a multilayered experience. Thus, making the monument open to a disoriented experience of the present, and not to a symbolic nostalgia, which in the end denied a literal interpretation of the project and its relation to the Holocaust. The fear of a direct and conventional relation between form and meaning was thus avoided.

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[128] See Hensel and Menges, The Heterogenous space of Morpho-ecologies. Michael Hensel, Christopher Hight, and Achim Menges, *Space reader : heterogeneous space in architecture*, AD reader, (Chichester: Wiley, 2009).
[129] Eisenman, "Architecture After the Age of Printing." 22
[130] Eisenman, "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" in Peter Eisenman, *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial: Eisenman Architects 1988-1998* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2003). 314
[131] Ibid.

Another major project which exposed this continuous fear of conventions is The City of Culture of Galicia (1999-) in Santiago de Compostela in Spain, which is Eisenman's biggest project to date. It comprises six buildings, the Museum of Galicia and an International Art Center, the Galician Library and the Periodicals Archive, the Music Theater and the Center for Cultural Innovation.[132] Four of the six buildings have currently been built and the remaining two are awaiting funding. The project started in 1999 and the book with explanatory texts, drawings and diagrams was published in 2005 with the title *Code X*. The long-term project could be seen to hold many of the tactics Eisenman employed in his previous work exemplified in the title of the book. *Code X* was a play on the words index and code, where the index was an often-used reference by Eisenman, but since it had become too conventional it needed something else. The code could thus represent a sign that needed interpretation which was not straightforward. As Eisenman put it: "in a common shared language, the sign-signified relationship is supposed to be transparent; in a code like poetry, it is more opaque, creating strangeness in the text and thus questioning the familiar methods of both writing and reading."[133] When codes became too conventional they lost their ability to question the familiar and began to act like indexes, which in the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce is defined as a causal relationship between sign and object. For instance, that smoke is an index for fire, or a footprint in the sand is and index for a person walking in the sand.[134] The codes did, according to Eisenman, become indexes when they started to be in line with the history of architecture, or more precisely the conventions of architecture which had been developed during its history. However, for Eisenman the central point was that:

> Architecture, like photography, is different from painting in that it already is an index. Its signs are traces of its own physicality. But architectural signs are also icons. For example, while a column is the sign of a column, its structuring function depends on it looking like a column for its representational function.[135]

[132] See the project description at the web page for Eisenman Architects. "City of Culture, Galicia" https://eisenmanarchitects.com/City-of-Culture-of-Galicia-2011
[133] Cynthia C. Davidson et al., *Code X : the City of Culture of Galicia* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005). 2
[134] See Charles Sanders Peirce "Logic as Semiotic," in *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce* ed. Justin Buchler (New York: Dover publications inc, 1955). 102. Also discussed in Peter Eisenman, "Digital Scrambler: From Index to Codex," in *Perspecta* vol 35. (2004) 40-53
[135] Peter Eisenman, "Coded Rewritings: The Process of Santiago" in *Code X: The City of Culture of Galicia* ed. Cynthia Davidson (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2005). 31

Another central point was that “there is no universal iconic sign system in architecture, and since architecture is always a second language (that is, its language is nor natural but learned), all architectural representation is coded.”[136] In the City of Culture Eisenman tried to employ an idea of the code rather than that of an index, and the aim was thus to erase the traces of a process that is found in an index. A series of overlaid plans works as a traditional form of an index, but with a “rewriting” of these plans as a three-dimensional matrix of vectors, they blurred the index. Moreover, different “regulating lines” were employed to translate the plans into the third dimension and to scramble “space, time and meaning”. The lines “evolve not from a single rotation, but from simultaneous rotations similar to a torquing action at multiple points”, which produce a dynamic transformation from the two-dimensional plan to the third dimension in a "fluid matrix.”[137] This was the coded rewriting of the two-dimensional overlayed plans in three dimensions.

The motivations for the complex process above are not easily grasped. As has been the case of many of Eisenman’s projects, the different formal iterations of the steps showed in the accompanying drawings and diagrams are not unambiguously given by his explanations. But the point is not to make it easily understandable, the point was precisely to make it “coded” and to “make an organicism in which geometry and space become a single continuous flow.”[138] In the end, the buildings in the City of Culture do not “look like” their specific function, and the whole project seems to be “growing out of the ground”. In addition, the interiors are not easily interpretated since they do not conform to ither classical symmetry, topological geometry, which now had its conventional representation in architecture, or to representations of function. So, according to Eisenman, the “code problematizes presence by undercutting formal and aesthetic conventions without requiring an indexical trace or record of activity.” The aim was thus as in his previous projects to criticize conventional meanings and conventional ways in which architecture signified.

In summary, what Eisenman has tried do in all his projects was to overcome and criticize architectural conventions and traditions. In the first houses it was, among other things, the structural load-bearing system and the representations of this system, either through walls or columns. In the cities of artificial excavation, it was representations of history, the relationship of site to buildings, and the scale of the objects. Later, conceptions of space, binary oppositions and the design process were all questioned by the projects, or at

[136] Ibid. 33
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid. 34

least the questioning was part of the explanations of the projects. As we have seen, many of the tactics, the overlaying of grids, lines, maps, and other figures, and the seemingly arbitrary formal transformations depicted in drawings and diagrams, have nevertheless been similar, at least since his projects of artificial excavations. As we have seen, both the shapes of the buildings and their explanations, however, were always slightly different.

**Fig 3.10** The overlaying of grids in an axonometric drawing for “Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors”, 1985, Peter Eisenman Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

As mentioned, this and the previous chapter are interconnected, and the point is to show Eisenman's continuous critique of meaning and signification. Eisenman summarized the aim of his architecture accordingly. "The whole idea of my architecture is about stopping any communication and placing within architecture itself a device that causes you to react emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Without representation. My architecture means nothing."[139] So, it was about making architecture meaningless, by infusing it with endless possibilities for reading and interpretation, which also made it almost impossible to criticize. In the essay, "Not Meant for Wrapping Purposes", Robin Evans criticized Eisenman's projects and his accompanying explanations and justifications for these projects. Eisenman's project of divesting architecture of meaning proved most effective when this could not be done. He further called Eisenman's architectural writing an armored vehicle protecting his architecture. [140]

Similarly, Jeffrey Kipnis described Eisenman's way of doing projects in one of the discussions in *Chora L Works*:

> When he does a project, he systematically establishes conditions and goals which are impossible to meet. He thereby systematically ensures that, under his own terms, these projects will fail. In this way, he prevents critical access to the project, he determines and prescribes critical reception, which always deflects attention from … By interposing his failure of announced intentions, he defends his project from interpretation and response.[141]

Eisenman responded that this was not intentional. According to him, his critics just did not understand the deeper levels where he was operating, which suggested that there was or is a correct way of reading the work.[142] The difficulties lie in defining this correct way of both making and interpreting an architecture which addresses the meaningless meaning. In the next

[139] Vladimir Belogolovsky, conversations with Peter Eisenman, Vladimir Belogolovsky and Peter Eisenman, *Conversations with Peter Eisenman: the evolution of architectural style* (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2016).
[140] Robin Evans, "Not to be Used for Wrapping Purposes, Peter Eisenman: Fin d'Ou T Hou S," *AA Files*, no. 10, Autumn 1985 (1985). 72
[141] One word is omitted because of the punched through holes in the book. Derrida, *Chora L works : Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*. 94
[142] "I think Jacques has the same problem people do not want to deal with the work. Someone like Richard Rorty can outwit Jacques by remaining at a certain level of Jacques' work which has nothing to do with the deeper levels where Jacques is operating. I feel a very much a friendship and kinship to you, Jacques, because our critics trivialize your work as do mine. You can't win with these critics. They are going to get me no matter what." In Derrida, *Chora L works : Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman*. 94

chapter I discuss the question of who or what defines the right ways to criticize the conventions and rules in the discipline of architecture.

# Chapter 4
# THE METAPHYSICS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

## 4.1 A Machine of Absolute Resistance

In the previous chapters I have described Peter Eisenman's understanding of architecture, and his continuous questioning of the meaning of architectural works. His critique of every claim to truth and origin for architecture made it possible for Eisenman to continuously change his own position. Meaning is and has been a stable component in this changing position and meaning has provided the foundation for Eisenman's definition of architectural works. In Chapter 2 I pointed to the question which he never explicitly asked about meaning. This question was, who ascribes meanings to works of architecture? Or, more generally, where do these meanings come from? If meanings are arbitrary, how does Eisenman decide which are the right ones to displace or deconstruct. Since Eisenman treats meaning both as continuously changing and as something abstract and immaterial, he inevitably needs to explain how something abstract and immaterial could change and identify the force that causes these changes. Karl Popper's theory of the three worlds suggest an explanation since third world objects are produced by human beings, but attain abstract, immaterial existence. This again raises the question about what qualifies as architecturally relevant meanings, and from who or what do these architectural meanings emerge.

In this chapter I argue that Eisenman relies on the concept of the avant-garde in order to respond to these dilemmas. The concept of the avant-garde contains the idea of a perpetual change, and the resulting avant-garde attitude is thoroughly present in Eisenman's work. In an article in 1989about the newly finished Wexner Center for the Arts, the architecture critic of The New York Times, Paul Goldberger, described Eisenman as a romantic like any other architect of the time. For Goldberger, he was someone "in love with the idea of the avant-garde and takes great joy in romanticizing it."[1] This nostalgia for the idea of the avant-garde, the thought of redefining the discipline of architecture, has been one of Eisenman's goals throughout his career. Accordingly, Alejandro Zaera Polo called him a "machine of absolute resistance,"[2] which is descriptive of the avant-garde attitude that Eisenman has exhibited both in his theorizing and in practice.

[1] Paul Goldberger, "Architecture View: The Museum That Theory Built," *The New York Times* (New York), 5.11 1989.
[2] Alejandro Zaera Polo, "Interview with Peter Eisenman " *El Croquis* 83 (1997).

In this chapter I first analyze and discuss the concept of the avant-garde in historical, contemporary, and the popular usage of the word. Second, I use the avant-garde as a possible explanation of Eisenman's continuous struggle against meaning in architectural works. In short, the development of the concept of the avant-garde went from an explicitly political term, where artists were supposed to provide guidance for a better society, to the classification of the avant-garde as a non-conformist artistic attitude, where the questioning of any conventional understanding becomes its ethos. Central to this development is the historical avant-garde of the early decades of the 1900s, which had its heydays in the interwar years. Movements like De Stijl, Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism were fundamental to the formulation of the concept of the avant-garde and have subsequently been a major influence on art and architecture ever since. This influence has not only pertained to the stylistic properties of the works of art, but more importantly as an experimentational and radical attitude where the break with previous norms and conventions was emphasized.

The work of the historical avant-garde arguably challenged the definitions of art, which in turn influenced the discussion on the social and cultural definitions of art that began in the 1960s. This discussion provides an explanatory backdrop for Eisenman's theories. The institutional theory of art proposed by Arthur Danto and George Dickie describes an understanding of art that substantially contributes to explaining Eisenman's work in architectural theory. Even if Eisenman does not discuss Dickie or Danto, his theorizing acquires clarity and consistency when read in relation to the positions they formulated. For Dickie and Danto, objects attained status as artworks by the social and cultural workings of the "Artworld." The institutional theory of art is thus a significant parallel with Leon Goldstein's philosophy of history, in which history is seen as simply what historians do. These positions relate to general discussions on science that occurred at the time, especially in the works of Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault, and more explicitly in works by Richard Rorty, who all emphasized the social and cultural workings which governed much of scientific development. As discussed in earlier chapters, throughout his career Eisenman has relied heavily on the social and culturally defined conventions for his critique of architectural signification and meaning. This raises the question of who defines these conventions and in turn who defines the proper critique of these conventions and meanings. Both the institutional theory and the concept of the avant-garde could illuminate these questions and provide a possible explanatory backdrop.

Eisenman's positioning and repositioning of architecture throughout his career rests on the assumption that architecture is a cultural field.[3] This may seem self-evident, but when Eisenman compares architecture with film, literature, and art, he opens the discipline to the same trends and social mechanisms as these fields. The work of Eisenman and the establishment of the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies made New York a focal point in the world of architecture. The production of magazines and exhibitions, their educational program and arrangements of lectures and cocktail parties made the Institute into a decisive cultural producer which participated, to use the title of a documentary about the institute, in "the making of avant-garde in America."[4] This has influenced architecture ever since, with previous fellows of the institute occupying major positions in the Ivy league universities of the east coast.[5]

To summarize, the ambition of this chapter is not just to show that Eisenman's work is an explicit exposition of an avant-garde attitude, but to discuss how the avant-garde is treated as a defining power, and that the concept is decisive for understanding Eisenman's position when it comes to the theoretical problems discussed in earlier chapters. As presented in the previous chapters, since Eisenman assumes that architectural works are defined by architectural meaning, he needs to explain the nature of this architectural meaning. To treat meanings as changing and dependent on social and cultural workings could hardly be classified as controversial. However, for Eisenman, the critique of meaning rests on the assumption that some of the social and cultural workings are given a special status that is not only a social phenomenon but attains a character as an abstract force. One could almost say that in Eisenman's theorizing, the avant-garde provides the metaphysical foundation which defines meanings that he subsequently deconstructs. This dialectical move, at the same time, qualifies him as the member of the same avant-garde. This would not work if the meanings that he attributes to architecture were not credible in the eyes of the avant-garde. At the same time, since these meanings are taken to have abstract, non-mental, Platonic existence, the

[3] Eisenman has, for instance, compared architecture to film and said in a discussion with Rem Koolhaas that: "We should make architecture like Michael Haneke make films," Brett Steele, ed., *Supercritical: Peter Eisenman & Rem Koolhaas with Jeffrey Kipnis and Robert Somol* (London: AA Publications 2010). Also, in a talk between Eisenman and Haneke, Eisenman asks rhetorically "what is architecture about," and continues to talk about the discipline of architecture as a cultural field, in: Paul Smith, "The Eisenman-Haneke Tapes," *ICON*, 2008.

[4] The documentary is made by Diana Agrest, who was a fellow at the Institute for Archtiecture and Urban Studies. See: Diana Agrest, "The Making of an Avant-Garde: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies 1967-1984," (USA, 2013).

[5] For instance: Kenneth Frampton, Anthony Vidler, Diana Agrest, Mario Gandelsonas, Stanford Anderson, and Rem Koolhaas.

workings of the avant-garde are necessarily assumed to affect the Platonic realm where these meanings reside. The avant-garde is then not a mere collection of individuals but a metaphysical force in its own right.

This interpretation is supported by how the idea of an avant-garde affected architecture culture in the late 1960s and how Eisenman's work is an exposition of an avant-garde attitude. Historically, the avant-garde took many forms, and it is often presented in the plural, as "the avant-gardes of the past," which in turn does not render an easy definition of the avant-garde as a singular group or movement. The avant-gardes of the present are similarly difficult to define, but like the avant-gardes of the past, they are, as we shall see, united by their desire for the new, and their oppositional and radical attitude. For Eisenman the avant-garde constituted the very definition of an architectural work.

### 4.2 Richard Rorty's Pragmatism

The aim of this chapter is to determine what has motivated Eisenman's desire to continuously criticize architectural meaning. As discussed in the previous chapters, for Eisenman, architectural meaning is the basis for his assumptions about the ontology of architectural works. These architectural meanings are related to the rules and conventions in the discipline and to how they are criticized. The avant-garde does, in this sense, work as the generator of these rules and conventions, but before going deeper into the specific workings of the avant-garde, it is necessary to see how one could understand Eisenman's avant-garde position in relation to a general philosophical discussion. This discussion shows that it was not uncommon for a significant force to be attributed to a social or cultural group. Richard Rorty, a leading figure in 20th century American philosophy, advanced a neo-pragmatist anti-foundationalism where he gave primacy to a definition of truth as what a "community" agrees to believe.[6] In the essay "Solidarity and Objectivity" Rorty explicitly argued in favor of what he called a pragmatist position in opposition to a realist one. He defended the charges of relativism from realists, by claiming that the point was that the pragmatist needed neither a metaphysical nor epistemological definition of truth, and that the realist and pragmatist definitions of "truth" were incompatible.[7] For the realist, *objectivity* is given primacy over *solidarity*, meaning that truth and knowledge have an intrinsic nature, which in turn

[6] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*, ed. Richard Rorty (New York Cabridge University Press, 1991). 24
[7] Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity." 24

presupposes that there exists a real and essential "man" and "nature."[8] This meant that truth did not rely on a correspondence to this reality. Conversely, for the pragmatist "there is nothing to be said about truth save that each of us commend as true those beliefs he or she finds good to believe."[9] For Rorty, this was not to be thought of as a self-refuting relativistic theory of truth since the pragmatist did not have a theory of truth in a metaphysical or epistemological sense, just an ethical one.

Eisenman participated in a debate with Rorty at the symposium "Things in the Making: Contemporary Architecture and the Pragmatist Imagination" at the Museum of Modern Art in 2000. Rorty downplayed the relevance of philosophy, and especially metaphysical truth claims, and argued that philosophy could be no more than the "sort of inspiration that you get from poets, painters, musicians, and architects."[10] Eisenman claimed that one needed a critical-theoretical, or philosophical discourse where one could criticize the "certainties" of architecture. Rorty, being a pragmatist relying on action, replied: "that's fine, Peter. You do what you need to do to do your work."[11] This discussion indicates that Eisenman did not explicitly hold the same pragmatic position as Rorty. Actually, Eisenman was being inconsistent in that he sought certainty in "criticality." However, Eisenman's reliance on the discipline, and especially the avant-garde as the defining power of architectural meaning, is equivalent to Rorty's reliance on the solidarity of a community as the only feasible definition of "knowledge." So, when Eisenman argued for a continuous criticism of "certainties," he took it for granted that this is the only definition of architecture and architectural meaning that one could have. He assumes the certainty of the "critique of certainties," and this critique is the stable and fixed procedure that defines Eisenman's work. He thus treated meaning, which is essential for his definition of architecture, as emerging from the avant-garde, almost being an abstract force when it is cemented as a convention in the discipline. This is comparable to Hilary Putnam's and Tyler Burge's position, presented in chapter 2, and the way in which meanings of words are fixed by a group according to a "division of linguistic labor."[12] The word "elm tree", for instance, is fixed by the community

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid. 23
[10] A presentation of the themes in the debate is given in: Joan Ockman, "Consequences of Pragmatism: A Retrospect on "The Pragmatist Imagination"," in *The Figure Of Knowledge: Conditioning Architectural Theory, 1960s-1990s*, ed. Rajesh Heynickx Sebastian Loosen, Hilde Heynen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020). 288
[11] This is quoted in: Philip Nobel, "What Pragmatism Ain't," *Metropolis* no. July 2001 (2001).
[12] Hillary Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning," *Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science* 7 (1975). 145, See also p. 63

of botanists, and the word "water" is fixed by the chemists. The meanings thus emerge from a certain group and get an abstract and immaterial ontological status. As we have seen in chapter 2, architectural meaning belongs therefore to the Popperian third world object. The point for Eisenman thus becomes to show that new meanings could emerge, and the whole process of criticizing and establishing new conventions starts over again. The avant-garde could thus continuously reinvent architecture. This rests on an age-long understanding of the avant-garde as the disruptors of a discipline, and in the next section I will outline the development of the term and subsequently connect it to Eisenman's position.

### 4.3 The Avant-garde Movement

The concept of the avant-garde is generally used to describe a group of people or several groups of people challenging conventional ways of doing things.[13] The avant-garde is usually characterized as being in opposition to the reigning mainstream, the establishment, or the bourgeoisie.[14] This oppositional attitude and the military origins of the term, the fighting on the front lines, give the avant-garde a role as leaders of art, architecture, or society in general. Consequently, the avant-garde are supposed to be finding new territories to conquer with a radical re-definition of their respective fields. In his book *The Avant-garde, a Very Short Introduction*, David Cottington emphasized the inherent contradiction in this understanding of the concept, which means that the avant-garde is both understood as separated from society at large and as leaders of this very same society.[15] In more contemporary terms, the need for commercial success and at the same time an inherent resistance to commercial forces exemplifies this contradiction. Accordingly, art and architecture have become a form of self-conscious cultural production in which the artists and architects both comprise the institution of art and the main critics of this same institution. I will return to this point later, but I will first give a brief overview of the development of the term and the movements associated with it.

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[13] In the Merriam Webster dictionary, it is defined as "an intelligentsia that develops new or experimental concepts especially in the arts." *Merriam Webster dictionary*, (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam Webster inc. 2021) "Avant-garde," https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/avant-garde

[14] This is argued in both in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, vol. 4, Theory and history of literature, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). And in: Patrik Schumacher, *The autopoiesis of architecture : a new framework for architecture : Vol. 1*, vol. Vol. 1 (Chichester: Wiley, 2011). See also Jeffrey Kipnis' description: "Peter Eisenman's architecture has become synonymous with a single-minded insistence on a conceptual critique of bourgeois architectural conventions." In Mathew Ford, Jeffrey Kipnis, and Peter Eisenman, *By other means : notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman*, vol. notes, projects, and ephemera from the miscellany of Peter Eisenman (Leiden: GAA Foundation, 2016).

[15] David Cottington, *The Avant-garde, a Very Short Intoduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

The term was first used, in a metaphoric non-military way, by the political theorist Henri de Saint-Simon in the early 19th century. Together with other utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, he argued for a new organization of state and society. Saint-Simon's vision for a utopian society was supposed to be spearheaded by the scientist, the industrialist, and the artist. The latter was seen as a visionary avant-garde capable of showing new social ideas to the people through poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and the like.[16] The avant-garde artist was to make a connection between art and society and propose ideas for a better life for the inhabitants. Art was thus given a purpose and was subjected to an ideological idea. In addition, around the same time, the notion of art for art's sake, promoted by Theophile Gautier, came to describe a certain artistic attitude which contradicted Saint-Simon's call for political utility.[17] The purposelessness of art was absorbed into the concept of the avant-garde and the role of the avant-garde artist was to develop art, not society, but since the artist had to maintain autonomy of art, he could only experiment with artistic means and lead the free arts. Shared by these two ambitions, the radical artistic development, and the radical political development was the revolutionary attitude in opposition to the mainstream, the establishment and the bourgeoise, and this attitude coincides with the views of Marxist authors.

Politically, the description of the avant-garde as certain revolutionary groups leading the masses was described both by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and later by Vladimir Lenin in his "What is to be done" (1902). The concept of the avant-garde was implied by the revolutionary attitude proposed for the artist, and for the role of the communist party as the vanguard of the proletariat.[18] In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels described the communists as the leaders of all the socialist parties of the world.

> The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.[19]

[16] Henri de Saint-Simon, Opinions Littéraires, Philosophiques et Industrielles, 341-342.
[17] Cottington, *The Avant-garde, a Very Short Intoduction*. 114
[18] This is discussed in Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987). 115
[19] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The communist manifesto* (Minneapolis, MN: First Avenue Editions, a division of Lerner Publishing Group, 2018).

Lenin followed this position and argued that the vanguard of the proletariat was supposed to be a party responsible for both protecting and promoting the Marxist ideas, as well as educating the rest of the proletariat in these ideas.[20] The goal for Lenin was to make the Russian proletariat "the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat," and to bring class political consciousness to the workers for the revolution to happen.[21] In this vanguardism, or avant-gardism, there is a clear parallel with the attitude of the artistic avant-garde. Lenin's vanguard led the revolution with the aim of establishing a new order, but as we shall see, within art and architecture, this goal for a new order was substituted with the belief in perpetual change. Nevertheless, in the early decades of the 20th century the avant-garde artist operated with revolutionary attitude. After the revolution in 1917, the avant-Garde artists and architects occupied a prominent position in the building of the new society. Artists such as Vladimir Tatlin, Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko both taught at the newly established art and architecture school Vkhutemas and experimented with new forms of artistic expression. Even if their artworks did not have an explicit political purpose, they sought an essential truth in their arrangement of form and materials, which could be loosely connected to any kind of progress, which included the political progress promised by the revolution.[22] However, after Lenin's death in 1924, the abstract formal experiments of the Russian avant-garde were considered to be bourgeois and elitist and became a target for political censorship.[23] Here, the difficult distinction between an artistic avant-garde and a political avant-garde became apparent, and there was obviously no straightforward connection between new forms in art and political ideology. The avant-garde tendencies in art were sometimes closer to an anarchistic individual expression.[24] For instance, while in exile in Switzerland, the anarcho-communist Piotr Kropotkin was a co-editor of a periodical titled *L'Avant-garde*, which influenced neo-impressionist painters such as Georges Seurat and Camille Pissarro in the late 1870s.[25] From these anarchistic influences

[20] See Vladimir Lenin's text "What is to be Done," in Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Henry M. Christman, *Essential Works of Lenin : ""What Is to Be Done?"" and Other Writings*, Essential Works of Lenin, (Newburyport: Dover Publications, 2012).
[21] Ibid. 48
[22] Hal Foster et al., *Art since 1900 : modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*, 3rd edition. ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016)., 138
[23] Ibid. 145
[24] Donald D. Egbert, "The Idea of avant-garde in Art and Politics," *Leonardo* 3, no. 1 (1970), https://doi.org/10.2307/1572057, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1572057. 81
[25] This is presented in Cottington, *The Avant-garde, a Very Short Intoduction*., 114, and Martha Ward, *Pissarro, neo-impressionism, and the spaces of the avant-garde* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

the concept of the avant-garde in art came to be closely connected with non-conformist or non-conventional attitudes.

To summarize, the early uses of the term avant-garde were caught between two different views on art: the belief in art for art's sake and the belief in art's social utility. Initially, the concept of the avant-garde was synonymous with ambitions of political change, but as Cottington noted, by the late 19th century the concept was more thoroughly connected to the arts.[26] This art-specific association continued during the early decades of the 20th century, where the term became more specifically associated with the experimental artists, whose goal was to challenge preconceived definitions of art in a desire to escape the establishment, the mainstream or the bourgeoisie.[27] As the artists associated with the dada-movement recognized, the avant-garde dies when it becomes accepted by the general public or the bourgeoisie.[28] Consequently, the avant-garde needed to continuously provide a critique of the existing conventions in order to keep its status as avant-garde. What I have described above shows some of the many forms the avant-garde took in its early years as a metaphorical concept. In the next section I outline some of the generalizing definitions of the concept and show how one classifies the avant-garde. This will make it easier to see how Eisenman understands the role of the avant-garde as a crucial force in the definition of architectural works.

### 4.4 Theorizing the Avant-garde

The definition of the concept of the avant-garde is part of a substantial tradition in the fields of art-history and literature criticism. One of the early historizations of the concept of the avant-garde was carried out in 1962 by the Italian literary theorist Renato Poggioli, who defined the term loosely as a sociological rather than aesthetic idea or tendency.[29] The avant-garde was analyzed as a case of group psychology, where the actors justified their work with an ideological position. This led Poggioli to further characterize the avant-garde movements with four specific "moments:" activism, antagonism, nihilism, and agonism.[30] The first two moments had a clear feature of being against something and were marked by an element of

[26] Cottington, *The Avant-garde, a Very Short Intoduction*. 53
[27] Ibid. 53
[28] Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*, 2 ed., ed. John Elderfield (New York: Viking Press, 1974)., Introduction, xxiv
[29] Renato Poggioli, *The theory of the avant-garde*, Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia, (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968). 3
[30] Ibid. 25. Also presented in Hilde Heynen, "What Belongs to Architecture? Avant-garde Ideas in the Modern Movement," *The Journal of Architecture* 4, no. 2 (1999), https://doi.org/10.1080/136023699373882.

sport and adventure. The Italian futurists, for instance, had this attitude in their search for the beauty of speed in relation to the new motorized vehicles.[31] For Poggioli, this gave the avant-garde a strong sense of heroism in which movement and change were more important than creation, which in turn provided the groundwork for a process of artistic distinction from reigning tendencies and popular opinion.

In the antagonistic moment, which was described as both an antagonism against tradition and an antagonism against public opinion, the psychological and sociological workings of an *art-world* were described:

> The modern artist replaces that particular environment, determined by his family and social origins, with what the French call *milieu artiste*. There, sect, and movement become a caste; hence a social fact in a primarily psychological way, motivated by vocation and election, not by blood or racial inheritance or by economic and class distinctions.[32]

Even if it is difficult, if not impossible, to give a complete explanation of the reasons for this desire for nonconformity, it was described by Poggioli as a psychological tendency with a "bohemian spirit," perverting and subverting conventional attitudes. This often resulted in provocations and scandal, but it is unclear whether the provocation was a goal in itself for the avant-garde, or if the works of art had a provocative effect because of some higher ambitions or features of the artworks. In Poggioli's last two moments, nihilism and agonism, the inner workings of the avant-garde become apparent. For if the avant-garde was supposed to be constantly changing, perverting, and subverting conventions, then the work of the avant-garde must also be perverted and subverted. This resulted in a father-son-antithesis or a battle between generations where the goal of one generation was to confront the rules and conventions of the previous one.

Matei Calinescu, another literary theorist, characterized the avant-garde in similar terms as a continuous search for crisis within society at large. For the movement to be radical, it needed a crisis to justify its existence. Calinescu emphasized the connection between the avant-garde and modernity, stating that the avant-garde was "little more than a radicalized and strongly utopianized version of modernity," characterized by an all-encompassing nihilism, whose unavoidable consequence was self-destruction.[33] The attitude rested on the creation of

[31] Poggioli, *The theory of the avant-garde*. 29
[32] Ibid. 31
[33] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*.96

an inside and outside, allies and enemies, and as Poggioli also noted: "nothing is easier to find than an enemy."[34] These descriptions established the idea of the avant-garde artist as an outcast who defined himself in relation to society at large. The artist became someone opposing the mainstream, which meant that he or she depended on mainstream society in order to distinguish him- or herself as a part of the avant-garde.

In his *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Peter Bürger provided a narrower definition of the avant-garde. His definition treated the avant-garde as a historical phenomenon, rather than an aesthetic or artistic one. He based his argument on the development of the bourgeois autonomous art in the 19th century, which was an art separated from the general practice of life and thus not a part of society. From this starting point, Bürger defined a historical avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s as a movement reacting to and criticizing the idea of this autonomous art. [35] The historical avant-garde was therefore defined by its goal to reconnect art with society. One of the tactics of the historical avant-garde was to criticize the institution of art through artworks, and thus redefine the work of art at the same time. By shifting the focus from the unity of a work of art to the relationship between the work and a viewer, they criticized the category in which a work of art was classified. When Marcel Duchamp signed a set of ordinary objects, most notably a urinal, and exhibited them in art galleries, it could not be done without a preconceived understanding of the work of art.[36] Bürger noted how the signature, usually used as a mark to indicate the individuality of a work, was used on an industrially mass produced object to fulfill the Dadaists goal of provoking the audience and their preconceived definition of an artwork.[37] By questioning the concept of a "work of art," there could be a reconnection of art and life, giving art a renewed "function" other than mere aesthetic expressions. According to Bürger, even if the art of the historical avant-garde did not manage to reclaim this usefulness, they managed, as was the case with the Dadaists, to show the uselessness of art.

Apparently, the work of the historical avant-garde did not manage to integrate art into the praxis of life, as Bürger noted, but they substantially changed the fundamental questions artists were both asking and answering with their art. Hal Foster described this change in attitude. Artists in the previous centuries, notably the pre-avant-gardes of the 19th century, were mostly concerned with aesthetic problems or with questions of the artistic medium.

[34] Poggioli, *The theory of the avant-garde*. 34
[35] Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, 4.
[36] Ibid. 56
[37] Ibid.

Simply, if art was good or bad, or if it was sculpture or painting. Conversely, the avant-garde of the early 20th century replaced these concerns with an ontological and epistemological question.[38] The important questions thus became "what is art?", "how does something become art?" and "how do we know it is art?" This did not result in making art crucial in the development of a new society, but instead, the artist became part in a self-referential and contradictory activity, which was to criticize the very institutions they were dependent on. Consequently, in their goal of pushing the boundaries, the avant-garde did succeed in questioning the definition of art, which inspired a continuous search for the new.[39]The movements of the early 20th century, which Bürger called the historical avant-garde, were generally defined by their inclination to break with established conventions, and with the rejection of tradition. In the writings from the 1960s and 1970s, the use of the plural form avant-gardes made it apparent that the avant-garde was not a unified group of artists that shared the same ways of doing art. Nevertheless, the avant-gardism that emerged out of these definitions showed a similar stance that a search for the new ways of doing art was essential. This did in turn require new justifications of art and architecture which were expressed in publications of theoretical positions in magazines, exhibitions, and manifestos. With the critical attitude and the positioning of art in relation to its context, to the rules and conventions of the disciple, there was a shift towards content over form. This gave primacy to interpretation of artworks, and the question was thus how art and architecture relied on its disciplinary rules. Eisenman's continuous critique of these rules and conventions, which provides the basis for architectural meaning, is especially relevant in this instance and belongs to the same category. Accordingly, this raises the question about who decides what the appropriate interpretation is, and this question relies on the definitions of art and architecture in general.

### 4.5 The Artworld

A major change in the definition and the understanding of art occurred when artists started to make art that was no longer defined by the standard medium, painting or sculpture. The distinction between aesthetics and art theory or art criticism is a revealing example of this challenge. Aesthetics is the philosophical study of sensible experience. First and foremost, it pertains to questions of beauty and matters of taste. In the mid-20th century art was generally

[38] Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* 70 (1994), https://doi.org/10.2307/779051, http://www.jstor.org/stable/779051.
[39] See Dominic McIver Lopes, *Beyond Art* (Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

defined in aesthetic terms.[40] For instance, Monroe Beardsley defined art aesthetically and concluded that certain conceptual artworks, such as Marcel Duchamp's urinal, *Fountain*, could not be classified as art.[41] But since these conceptual avant-garde artworks came to be viewed as art, this could not be the whole story.

As with architecture, one of the main issues in art theory or the philosophy of art is the ontological question: what is an artwork? This often leads to a discussion of necessary and sufficient criteria for defining artworks, which has often been unsuccessful. [42] Even if there still is and was a connection between aesthetics and art theory, there has been disagreement over the role aesthetics plays in the definitions of art and to what degree art relates to aesthetic concerns. This is related to the discussion of form and content, and the difference between the perceptible and conceptual properties of works of art and architecture. So, the question was: if aesthetics were about sensible experience, beauty and ugliness, how could it include the conceptual properties of an artwork? With the growth of the avant-garde and conceptual art, the interpretation and reading of artworks inevitably acquired primacy and blurred the distinction between perceptible and conceptual properties.

Questions pertaining classificatory criteria and the ontology of artworks came to be discussed extensively by analytic philosophers in the latter half of the 20th century. The development in art from Dada in the 1910s to conceptual, minimalist and performance art in the 1960s challenged the definitions of the artwork.[43] Aesthetic relevance with a set of criteria for an aesthetic appreciation was no longer satisfactory because there were clearly artworks without these qualities which still classified as art or were regarded as classifiable. Consequently, the difficulty of philosophers to state satisfactory criteria in the definition of art gave rise to the institutional theory. Since everything could not be classified as art, there was a need for some justification for categorizing one object as art and another just as an object. Arthur Danto and George Dickie advocated for a social solution to the problem and suggested that a group of people have these defining capabilities, namely the Artworld.

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[40] Joseph Margolis has given a summary of this in Joseph Margolis, "The Importance of Being Earnest about the Definition and Metaphysics of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 3 (2010), http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793263.

[41] See: Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1958).

[42] See for instance: Stephen Davies, "Definitions of Art," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001). 170

[43]This is acknowledged by both Jerrold Levinson, "Refining Art Historically," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47, no. 1 (1989), https://doi.org/10.2307/431990, http://www.jstor.org/stable/431990. and by Stephen Davies, "Defining Art and Artworlds," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, no. 4 (2015)., *Art definitions*

In his essay "The Artworld," Danto described the rise of avant-garde art and especially the contribution of ready-mades such as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* or Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* to the theory of the "Artworld." Since these objects did not have any physical properties that distinguished them from ordinary objects, they had to be defined by something else. This led to Danto's Paradox: how could it be possible that two materially identical objects exist and only one was considered a work of art? This could not be answered by traditional aesthetics since the two objects were perceptually and thus aesthetically equivalent. If only one is considered a work of art, then its *arthood* could not lie in its aesthetic features, but in what Danto called its "art-relevant" features. These features did in turn require knowledge: "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an Artworld."[44] The crucial move for Danto was to define art in relation to a theory about the object, and not about the object itself. "It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art and keeps it collapsing into the real object it is."[45] Therefore, in order to see these kinds of objects as art one needed to have a certain knowledge of artistic theory to make a distinction between art and non-art.[46]

George Dickie took the idea of an Artworld further and developed it into the institutional theory of art. He argued that the "work of art" was impossible to define and emphasized the importance of making a distinction between a descriptive and an evaluative definition.[47] Dickie was interested in the former, and concluded that: "A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some society or some sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation."[48] This was elaborated in his book *The Art Circle*, where five interrelated definitions comprised the totality of a work of art. First, "a work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an Artworld public." Second, art is done by an artist, who is "a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art." Third, the artist's understanding must include the belief that there is an Artworld and that the Artworld contains options which Dickie calls "frameworks"—for the presentation of artworks. Fourth, "The Artworld is the totality of all Artworld systems," and fifth, "An Artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to

[44] Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964). 580
[45] ibid. 581
[46] Hans van Maanen, *How to study art worlds : on the societal functioning of aesthetic values* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009). 20
[47] George Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophy Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1969).
[48] George Dickie, *What is Art? An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).34

an Artworld public."[49] The definition of art thus becomes contextual, and the framework around the artwork becomes more important than the physical properties of the artwork. This means that the institutional theory proposes a relational definition of art. Consequently, an abstract painting, like Ad Reinhardt's *Black Square*, could be just as artistically rich as Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* because of its art-relevant properties, properties defined by its relation to the Artworld at that point in time.[50] Art was thus an open and relational concept, which is like Eisenman's definition of architecture discussed in the first chapter. In the institutional theory there simply is no set of properties that all artworks must share, other than an agreed upon status as art ratified by the Artworld.

In his book, *Art Worlds*, the sociologist Howard Becker noted that both Dickie and Danto were using merely hypothetical examples in their attempts to reveal logical inconsistencies, and Becker wanted to address the complex Artworld from a sociological point of view. [51] Dickie acknowledged that that the Artworld is composed of artists, producers, museum directors, museum goers, journalists, critics, art historians, art theorists, philosophers of art and others, but also that "every person who sees himself as a member of the Artworld is thereby a member."[52] For Becker this definition was obviously too broad. He proposed a more socially defined membership, namely that the members entitled to speak on behalf of the Artworld must be accepted by other members of the Artworld.[53] The problem with this approach is that the participants in the Artworld seldom agree on who is entitled to speak on behalf of the whole Artworld. Even if there are institutional positions, museum directors and curators, which could decide whether to exhibit or not exhibit works and thus decides what counts as art, there is no general agreement on the legitimacy of these decisions.[54] In his sociological approach, Becker did not intend to give an ontological definition of art, he rather studied the Artworlds empirically. He emphasized the importance of the collective cooperation in the making of artworks, from the idea of the artist, through the production of materials, to the reception of an audience. Accordingly, Becker paid special attention to the rules and conventions necessary for the intertwined workings of the Artworld.[55] Both the distribution and the reception of art required a shared understanding of

[49] George Dickie, *Art and the aesthetic : an institutional analysis* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1974).
[50] Danto, "The Artworld." 583
[51] Howard S. Becker, *Art worlds* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1984). 150
[52] Dickie, *Art and the aesthetic : an institutional analysis*. 35
[53] Becker, *Art worlds*.151
[54] Ibid. 152
[55] Ibid. 108

conventions, and this shared understanding was especially important for the avant-garde and their tendency to break and transgress these conventions. A shared understanding of meaning is arguably important in architecture as well, and the reliance on conventions in the collective production of buildings is worth considering since it plays a significant part in the definition of the role of the architect, especially for Eisenman, who has relied heavily on cemented conventions for his "displacement" of meaning and signification.

The responses to the institutional theory of art have mostly been from the proponents of more traditional definitions of art where aesthetics has played a substantial part. As mentioned, Monroe Beardsley, who argued for a definition of art based on values and functions, and Nick Zangwill, who is concerned with aesthetic judgements and the properties responsible for these judgements, both rely on aesthetic value.[56] In opposition, the proponents of the institutional theory tried to avoid evaluative definitions and did not account for aesthetics, but only what could be necessary and sufficient criteria for the definition of art. One of the main arguments of the institutional theory is precisely that art is not defined by the artwork's ability to provide an aesthetic experience or any other evaluative criteria.[57] This is similar to Eisenman's rejection of aesthetic issues. Dickie was explicit about this and has written specifically against Beardsley's theory of aesthetic experience, which he deemed to be "a theory of what works of art do, not of what they are."[58] Conversely, the institutional theory was an attempt to distinguish art from non-art.

More recently, the discussions on the definitions of art have tended towards an all-encompassing theory, where both aesthetic concerns, artistic intentions and institutional accounts are eligible. Stephen Davies has for instance in his summary of the problems of defining art argued for this kind of middle ground.[59] Even if the institutional theory has provided a kind of circular definition of art, it accounts for some of the major problems of art and provides a framework for understanding the rise of the avant-garde as the defining power in both art and architecture. If the historical avant-garde were responsible for the problems of defining art, the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s strengthened the institutional theory and the role of the socially defined Artworld as a discriminating force.

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[56] See Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca ;London: Cornell University Press, 2001). and Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*.
[57] Dickie, Art and Value,
[58] Dickie, The Art Circle, 85, also discussed in Maanen, *How to study art worlds : on the societal functioning of aesthetic values*. 18
[59] Davies, "Defining Art and Artworlds."; Davies, "Defining Art and Artworlds."

### 4.6 Content, not Objects

The concept of avant-garde that is needed to explain Eisenman's theoretical positioning fits neatly into the institutional theory of art. With its oppositional attitude and transgressive goal, it is obviously relational, fluid, and dynamic. So, when the avant-garde in art or architecture transgresses the conventions of their respective fields, new conventions are made and must in turn be transgressed by a new avant-garde. The result was, as the proponents of the institutional theory of art did argue, that the definitions of the objects of art and architecture also becoming fluid and dynamic. For instance, the move from "medium-specific" to "debate-specific" projects gave value to painting, sculpture or buildings based on how well they addressed discursive issues and pushed the conventional definitions.[60] These discursive issues, either connecting art to a praxis of life, politics or the internal workings of the discipline could be regarded as the conceptual content of the work and were favored over the formal properties of the object. Even if a work was formally avant-garde, it was always evaluated in relation to previously established conventions, and thus required some knowledge about these conventions. A good example is Eisenman's use of a system of columns and walls in House II to create a structural redundancy and thus a displacement of "meaning." Consequently, the classification as avant-garde always required some additional content. In architecture an avant-garde building may not be appreciated for its shape and spatial characteristics, but for the way it problematizes the reigning definition of architecture. This established the fields of art and architecture as intellectual practices where one produced content rather than objects. From this perspective, K. Michael Hays described architecture as a "specific kind of socially symbolic production whose primary task is the construction of concepts and subjects' positions rather than the making of things." [61]

Since art or architecture were no longer dependent just on objects, such as paintings sculptures or buildings, they needed more platforms than the gallery, the street, the square or the field. The avant-garde needed to express their position, and the growth of avant-garde publications is a telling example of the content-producing artists. Independent magazines containing polemics and manifestos established the artist's positions and engendered communities for the avant-garde.[62] These self-published magazines, like the historical avant-

[60] Hal Foster, *The return of the real : the avant-garde at the end of the century*, October books, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996). IX

[61] K. Michael Hays, *Architecture's desire : reading the late avant-garde*, Writing architecture series, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010). 1

[62]Sophie Seita, *Provisional avant-gardes : little magazine communities from Dada to digital*, Post-45, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019). 4

garde's *De Stijl* in the Netherlands, *L'espirit Nouveau* in France, *G* in Germany and many others were, according to Sophie Seita, necessary for shaping and continuously reshaping the discourse of art.[63] Different avant-garde groups had their magazines and contributed to an institutionalization of the avant-garde attitude. This further emphasized the mentioned contradiction where the avant-garde was at its core anti-institutional but not able to resist their own institutionalization. A difficult question that arises is whether one is avant-garde because of one's critical attitude and engagement in oppositional and transgressive projects, or whether one does oppositional and transgressive projects in order to be a part of the avant-garde? This chicken and egg-like question arguably no has certain answer, but the distinction that has been made between the historical avant-garde in the interwar period and the neo-avant-garde from the 1960s onward might give us a clue to the answer.

The critical attitude of the avant-gardes of the 1910s and 1920s arguably hit a nerve in the 1960s, both in art and architecture, but the avant-garde appeared slightly different in this "second coming." This led to the distinction that theorists like Bürger, Poggioli and Calinscu made between the historical avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s and a neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s.[64] While the former, even if it did not succeed, seemingly had an "authentic" reason for their radical break with the past, the latter had, in their knowledge and influence of the historical avant-garde, acquired a self-awareness that made their art self-referential. According to Bürger, the goal of the historical avant-garde was to criticize the institution of art, and since the neo-avant-garde had become the institution, this criticism became unattainable.[65]

One of the main differences between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde was precisely their positioning in the field at large. The historical avant-garde was an oppositional group of people positioned on the margins of the discipline, while the neo-avant-garde had the same attitude but were positioned in the center. For Bürger, this meant that the "the neo-avant-garde institutionalized the *avant-garde as art* and thus negated genuinely avant-gardist intentions."[66] This was a return to the explorations of the autonomy of art, and not a reconnection to a praxis of life, but as Bürger acknowledged, what could be more avant-garde than to go against the work of the previous avant-garde? The neo-avant-garde thus

[63] Ibid. 5
[64] See Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, 4. and Foster, *The return of the real : the avant-garde at the end of the century*.
[65] Bürger, *Theory of the avant-garde*, 4. 53
[66] Ibid. 61

explored the new in art without any political or social concern. They performed a staging of the break with tradition, a happening without meaning, and thus emptied art of any political or social impact thereby making it open to any meaning whatsoever.[67] Even if Bürger has been criticized for idealizing the art of the past and being too cynical about the art of his present, his argument about the institutionalization of the avant-garde has received widespread recognition. Becker's work on the Artworld has, for instance, shown that the social institution of art is inevitable, and Cottington noted that even the historical avant-garde just created an alternative professionalism and did not abolish the institutionalization of art.[68]

A contributing factor to the growth of both the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde was the rise of a commercialized popular culture and the growth of consumerism.[69] The art-market and the desire for the new was profitable for the avant-garde, which arguably provided newness. As will be elaborated later, the growing cultural industry and the increased competition in the attention economy created a commercialization where no one was exempted. This view was expressed by Philip Johnson, who described the Museum of Modern Art in New York as an institution that capitalized on the avant-garde. With their commodification they both popularized the avant-garde and killed its "authentic spirit" when they commercialized, packaged, and sold it.[70]

In the early 1990s, Paul Mann made a sort of meta-critical analysis of the avant-garde art movements in his "The theory-death of the avant-garde." He pointed to the problems of the "discursive economy" they created. According to Mann, the avant-garde was consumed by the very bourgeoisie it was supposed to criticize. Therefore, "works of art are determined by their ability to move through and hence maintain the discursive apparatus. The work's value is defined above all by its power to generate discourse about it."[71] The more oppositional, the more avant-garde, the more discourse it creates and the more relevant it is. So, as Mann points out, to proclaim the death of the avant-garde is also ironical, since it provides the field with discursive productivity. The goal of the avant-garde was not and did not change life or society, but the goal became to change the discourse of art and architecture. This was created by a need to always portray the disciplines in a state of perpetual crisis. The

[67] Ibid.
[68] Cottington, *The Avant-garde, a Very Short Intoduction*. 97
[69] Ibid. 106
[70] This is suggested by Philip Johnson in "A conversation Around the Avant-garde" transcribed in: Robert Somol, *Autonomy and ideology : positioning an avant-garde in America* (New York: The Monacceli Press, 1997). 42
[71] Paul Mann, *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

avant-garde project is thus a nihilistic endeavor where art is constantly destroying itself, and only by destroying itself can it constantly be renewed.[72] Consequently, the architectural avant-garde could be the producers of new meanings, which emerge out of this "group" and attain an abstract character, and then a new avant-garde could make a critique of these meanings, and the process starts over again. This raises the question: who was the architectural avant-garde?

### 4.7 Historizing the Architectural Avant-gardes

As the works of Poggioli, Calinescu and Bürger have shown, in the 1960s and 1970s there was a tendency to historicize, classify and categorize what was meant by the avant-garde. This tendency was also apparent in the writing of architecture history during the same period. In a survey of the concept of the avant-garde in architecture, Lina Stergiou showed that the concept first received interest among architectural historians in the 1960s.[73] For Stergiou, there was a tendency of historians and critics to "avantgardify" the architects and artists of the past. By making a new conceptual framework, often with unclear classificatory criteria, the architects could be approved and earn the label avant-garde.[74] During the early 1960s, the historization of the modern movement started to include the concept of the avant-garde, notably by Reyner Banham in his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960) and by Leonardo Benevolo in his *History of Modern Architecture* (1960). The first usages of the concept denote a connection between architecture and general cultural tendencies. Like Bürger's definition of the historical avant-garde, the connection between architecture and life was emphasized by Benevolo.[75] He also connected the avant-garde with the idea of an artistic genius who was against any prevailing styles, experimenting to "change the inherited conventions of the past." These artists and architects were involved in the contradictory activity of both leading and criticizing the mainstream of their institutions. Benevolo emphasized that the historical avant-garde was not necessarily aware of this contradiction but rather that the avant-garde was a group that "make everyone a party to a jealously-guarded

[72] This is noted by Tafuri, who cites Jean Fautrier: "the ethic of the dialectical becoming of avant-garde art which – in the worlds of Fautrier "can only destroy itself" and which only by destroying itself can constantly renew itself." Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge: MIT press, 1987). 54

[73] Lina Stergiou, "1960s Institution Architecture: Avant-Garde Roots and Function," *Re:bus*, no. 8 (2017). 4

[74] Ibid. 22

[75] Leonardo Benevolo, *History of modern architecture : Vol. 2 : The modern movement*, vol. Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).p. 258,

individual experiment, to speak to everyone while refusing to listen to anyone."[76] The avant-garde was thus described as an elite group who distinguished themselves from everyone else, but who also needed everyone else in order to make themselves exceptional.

This self-conscious avant-garde position is something Patrik Schumacher emphasized in *The Autopoiesis of Architecture* (2011). For him, the avant-garde in art and architecture have been the defining power and are thus responsible for progress in these fields. Consequently, the avant-gardes are necessary for the development of both architecture and society.[77] Schumacher argues for the need for a continuous development in architecture and compares the discipline with other scientific processes. The emphasis is given to paradigm shifts, and the avant-garde is supposed to push for the new paradigm while the mainstream is practicing the old. He thus argues for a necessary relationship between the avant-garde and the mainstream. In Schumacher's theory, the avant-garde is not at the margins of the profession, but at the center and fighting "the most intense battles" in the discipline.[78] The constant oppositions of the avant-garde and the mainstream thus contribute substantially to his "autopoietic" system of architecture. Schumacher justifyies the existence of an avant-garde by pointing to the continuous developments of society in general. The avant-garde are those who make art and architecture appropriate to these cultural changes by opposing the practice of the mainstream. Consequently, the oppositional attitude which characterizes the avant-garde is both wanted and perceived as good.

Architectural history was for both Schumacher and Eisenman marked by radical innovations following such oppositional attitudes, and Eisenman wanted to be a part of this succession of breaks with the past.[79]A tendency that Stergiou emphasizes is the inclusion of the architecture of the Russian avant-garde (1917-1932) into architecture history. This inclusion involved participating in creating an interest in the avant-garde and pursuing radical and utopian projects. According to Stergiou, even though the Russian avant-garde in some instances became stripped of their political causes, they became a representation of what "avant-garde architecture" was, both in formal and ideological terms.[80] Together with the historization of the modern movement they played a crucial role in shaping the understanding of an architectural avant-garde in the 1960s.

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[76] Ibid. 259
[77] Schumacher, *The autopoiesis of architecture : a new framework for architecture : Vol. 1*, Vol. 1., 95
[78] Ibid.
[79] Joan Ockman, "Venice and New York," *Casabella* no. 619-620 (1995). 59
[80] Stergiou, "1960s Institution Architecture: Avant-Garde Roots and Function." 7

The influence of the Russian avant-garde is apparent in several architectural movements from the 1960s. It is present in Kenzo Tange and the formal expressions of Japanese Metabolism, in Archigram and their technological pop-architecture, in Team 10, and in utopian projects of the situationists and Guy Debord. Later, during the 1970s, Rem Koolhaas resurrected the constructivist Ivan Leonidov in a discussion of the connection between architecture and modern life in the city. Koolhaas applied the constructivists creation of "the new Soviet man" to his construction of the "new metropolitan man,"[81] and used the radical unbuilt projects of Leonidov as a touchstone for his own architectural experiments.

The reinvention of the historical avant-garde could be seen an avant-garde activity in itself. In the exhibition catalog for *The Architecture of Deconstruction* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1988, Mark Wigley explicitly emphasized the formal influence of the Russian avant-garde. To avoid the connection between the exhibited projects and the philosophy of deconstruction, he instead made a connection to the architectural tradition and saw the projects as a continuation of the constructivism of the 1920s. According to Wigley, "the Russian constructivism constituted a critical turning point where the architectural tradition was bent so radically that a fissure opened up through which certain disturbing architectural possibilities first became visible."[82] So, the break with traditional rules of composition that the Russian avant-garde proposed worked as an inspiration to produce an "unstable, restless geometry" for the Deconstructivists.

As mentioned, in the work of the Russian avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s there was an idea of making an architectural revolution together with the societal revolution, but according to Wigley, the more societal or "real" the architectural projects got, the less interesting they were. All the disturbing tension and instability got lost in the realization of the architectural projects, and "architecture maintained its traditional role. In this sense, the radical avant-garde project failed in architecture." [83] When modernism became accepted it simply died as an avant-garde project because it did not represent the radical instability which Wigley sought. He found this in the architecture of deconstruction, but as with the previous avant-garde movements it faced the same danger if it became accepted by the public. So, the avant-garde is thought of as an idea of permanent innovation.

[81] Rem Koolhaas, "The Future's Past," *The Wilson quarterly (Washington)* 3, no. 1 (1979). 138
[82] Mark Wigley, *The architecture of deconstruction : Derrida's haunt* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993). 11
[83] Ibid. 16

### 4.8 An Avant-garde in America

In a conference, called "Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an architectural avant-garde in America, 1923-49," organized by Phyllis Lambert and Peter Eisenman at Columbia University in New York in 1996, Philip Johnson was honored as the key figure in the development of an architectural avant-garde in America. Even if Johnson never considered himself to be an "avant-garde man," he contributed to the creation of an architectural elite with power to define the new architecture.[84] This movement, if one could call it that, did not have the political or oppositional attitude of the historical avant-garde, but they sought to establish the distinction between the avant-garde and the mainstream, which Schumacher also characterized as essential. Centered in New York City, this new avant-garde made close ties to the big art-institutions and other participants of the intelligentsia of the city.[85]

In the discussions in the previous chapters, it is apparent that Eisenman has exhibited an avant-garde attitude which has provided him with the continuous quest for the new through a self-conscious critique of the discipline of architecture. This critique fits well into the narrative about the neo-avant-garde and the institutionalization of the avant-garde with the subsequent loss of the political ambitions. For Eisenman, both Philip Johnson's and Alfred Russel Hitchcock's exhibition, *The International Style* in 1932 and later Johnsons's and Mark Wigley's *Deconstructivist Architecture* in 1988 did introduce an avant-garde stripped of any, especially leftist, political, or ideological motive, which both modernism of the 1920s and constructivism possessed.[86] Johnson acknowledged this, even though he thought of himself as an ardent enthusiast or "sponsor of the avant-garde." He said that: "we were proud to be avant-gardists; we wore our enthusiasm as a badge of honor that distinguished us as culturally superior to those around us,"[87] but that "nobody told us it was about revolution, we thought of it as aesthetically revolutionary." As he said, "everyone argued that modern art and architecture would make the world a better place, that, so to speak, one would become a better person living in a glass house. I can testify it ain't true."[88] For Johnson, the avant-garde simply satisfied his desire to be famous and cured his boredom. Eisenman has expressed his admiration for Johnson's ability to reinvent himself.

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[84] Somol, *Autonomy and ideology : positioning an avant-garde in America*.

[85] Kim Förster, "The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York (1967-1985). Ein kulturelles Project in der Architektur." (PhD ETH 2011)., 25

[86] Peter Eisenman, "Philip Johnson: Romanticism and Disintegration," in *Philip Johnson. The Constancy of change*, ed. Emmanuel Petit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). 226

[87] Discussion between Kipnis and Johnson in: Somol, *Autonomy and ideology : positioning an avant-garde in America*. 42

[88] Ibid. 44

> It is Johnson's nature to be always one step ahead, astride every situation while others are off balance. And it is this capacity to understand and pinpoint where that balance is at any given time that gives Johnson the opportunity to remove himself from the center, to be on the edge, and to be able to jump aside to yet another delicate periphery when the center has caught up to his former position.[89]

A critical view formulated at the time was Manfredo Tafuri's, who claimed that the perpetuating desire of the neo-avant-garde to reinvent the discipline during the 1960s and 1970s failed to produce something that made life and society better and were only performing empty formal games.[90] Tafuri has described the neo-avant-garde with similar pessimism as Bürger and Mann and pointed to the relations between architecture and the capitalist society. This has been especially apparent in the American version of the neo-avant-garde in architecture. For instance, Tafuri characterized "The New York Five"(John Hejduk, Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey and Michael Graves) as "being in essence schizophrenic, as being split between a nostalgia for "Kultur" and an anti-historical determination to sadistically destroy its very substance."[91] In their self-aware desire to be avant-garde, these architects, and particularly Eisenman, had to criticize, distort, and displace the meaning and signification of shapes and forms. The ideology and political aspirations of the early modern avant-garde were thus removed in favor of a self-referential game of formal abstraction.[92]

This was also noted by Colin Rowe in his introduction to *Five Architects,* where he began by contending that the proliferation of modern architecture in the postwar world ruined the initial revolutionary ambitions of a utopian future.[93] According to Rowe, in America, modernism never had the revolutionary ambitions, it was simply a "new approach to building

[89] Eisenman, "Behind the Mirror: On the writings of Philip Johnson," in Peter Eisenman, ed., *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). 100

[90] Manfredo Tafuri, "L'Architecture dans le boudoir," in *Oppositions Reader,* ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998 [1978]).

[91] Manfredo Tafuri, ""European Graffiti." Five x Five = Twenty-Five," in *Oppositions Reader*, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998 [1976]). 37

[92] Tafuri writes: "But in their work, Eisenman and Hejduk do not attempt to recapture that ideology. Instead, they mercilessly dissect it. Any evocation of the processes typical to the avant-garde is blocked at the very points where the avant-garde proposed itself as a "political" instrument." In: Tafuri, ""European Graffiti." Five x Five = Twenty-Five." 49

[93] Colin Rowe, "Introduction: Five Architects," in *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). 3

– and not much more." Modern architecture was thus made safe for capitalism and catalogued "among the cultural trophies of the affluent society."[94]

### 4.9 The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies

Central in the development of Eisenman's avant-garde project is the establishment of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York. The institute became an influential promoter of avant-garde architecture in the 1970s, and was supported by the Museum of Modern art and Cornell University, and received contributions from several private sponsors. [95] Their activities included urban design projects, educational programs, research, the publications of the journals *Oppositions* and *Skyline* and they hosted various exhibitions, debates and lectures.[96] As Kim Förster has shown in his dissertation, *The Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies 1967-1985, Ein kulturelles Project in der Architektur*, the institute was not just a think tank producing theory, but more of a total cultural project. As such, they relied on the development of a substantial network of fellows, students, guests and trustees, and everything was controlled and managed by Eisenman.[97] Förster relies on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his theories of "institutionalization" where the creation of a socially defined authority is central. The IAUS was thus a house of cultural production claiming the defining power in American architecture. This established New York and the east coast as the focal point for the architectural avant-garde, not only in America, but in the world.[98]

In the early years of the institute, they had an ambition to design and did in fact build real projects.[99] They were occupied with doing public housing projects collaborating with the housing development unit (HUD) and the Urban League, which were working on social housing for the African American community.[100] These projects were thought of as research projects and were supposed to connect theoretical experiments with the real problems of

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Förster, "The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York (1967-1985). Ein kulturelles Project in der Architektur.." Kim Förster, and Joan Ockman

[96] Kim Förster et al., *Die Netzwerke des Peter Eisenman : [Produktion von Wissen und Kultur am "Institute for Atchitecture and Urban Studies" in New York (1967-1985)]*, vol. 19(2013), ARCH+ features, (Aachen: ARCH+ Verlag, 2013).

[97]Förster, "The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York (1967-1985). Ein kulturelles Project in der Architektur.." 6

[98] See also Ockman, "Venice and New York."

[99] The history of these projects is comprised in: Kim Förster, "The Housing Prototype of The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies," *Candide - Journal For Architectural Knowledge*, no. 5 (2012).

[100] Allais Lucia, "The Real and the Theoretical, 1968," *Perspecta* 42 (2010).

urban development. The Institute thus positioned itself as a mediator between the academic world of the university and the practical world of architectural offices and planning agencies.[101] With the exhibition "Another Chance for Housing: Low-rise alternatives," at the Museum of Modern Art, the IAUS displayed their new ideas to a professional audience of architects, artists, and other participants of the cultural elite, and thus contributed to the overall discourse.[102] With the financial setbacks in the 1970s, which resulted in a decline of public funding for these kinds of projects, the institute changed their focus towards education, publishing and exhibitions, or from material to immaterial labor. With this shift the architect was not just a designer of buildings but was established as a public intellectual and cultural producer.

Enhanced by the attention economy of late capitalism, the institute was blending entertainment and culture.[103] The loosely constructed fight between the "Whites" or the "New York Five", (Peter Eisenman, John Hejduk, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey and Richard Meier) and the "Greys" (Robert A. M. Stern, Charles Moore, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown), respectively representing the modern and the postmodern, was part of this conflation of culture and entertainment. This created what Förster has called an "amusement for the culturally interested New York audience."[104]

Another telling example is the documentary from 2013 by previous fellow of the Institute, Diana Agrest, with the fitting title *The Making of an Avant-garde in America*. The film focuses on the "energy" within the institute and the interaction between certain people affected and driven by the events of 1968 and the following years of radical optimism.[105] The film can be viewed as a glorification of the impact the institute had on architecture and is a revealing example of the creation of an excluding architecture culture. Eisenman said in a retrospective interview conducted in the film that "either you were with us, or you were against us." Even if Eisenman said that he did not regard the institute as avant-garde, both he and the other members of the institute have exhibited an attitude that corresponds with the definitions of the avant-garde discussed earlier in this chapter.

[101] IAUS, Structure and Purpose of the IAUS, 1967, IAUS Collection Canadian Center for Architecture, CCA Archive, Montreal.
[102] Kenneth Frampton, Catalog for the exhibition. 1973
[103] Förster, "The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York (1967-1985). Ein kulturelles Project in der Architektur.." 21
[104] Ibid.
[105] Agrest, "The Making of an Avant-Garde: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies 1967-1984."

Both the excluding behavior, the definition of an outside and inside and the oppositional attitude are typical characteristics of the avant-garde, and these were explicit in the institute. In a document explaining the structure and purpose of the IAUS, it was stated that they were supposed to front a "new experimental education," and to be "intellectually independent but socially engaged."[106] This call for independence from the established academic institutions is also a typical avant-garde trait and even if the institute needed the architectural establishment financially, they felt the need to proclaim their independence.

The activity of the institute fits neatly in the description of the neo-avant-garde as cultural producers with an idea about the avant-garde as transgressors of conventions, rather than directly in opposing the established institutions. Eisenman, for instance, said in retrospect that: "We weren't avant-garde, by the way. Even though I wanted to be, you couldn't have been. We were reacting against what was the avant-garde. We were transgressors of what they had put in place. But how do you transgress the transgressors. There isn't much room."[107] What the idea of the neo-avant-garde includes, however, is precisely this transgression of the transgressors. So, the avant-garde ambition was arguably there, and the desire to construct a theoretical position contributed to this ambition.

Eisenman, who was a fierce collector of magazines, and especially the ones from the interwar period, the heyday of the historical avant-garde, confirmed that he wanted to supplement his collection with his own magazine, which he thought would be the best record of that moment in the 1970s.[108] Eisenman admired the Italian magazine *Casabella* from the 1930s for its content on Guiseppe Terragni, and he had an interest in early Dutch modernism and the *De Stilj* magazine from the late 1910s. He wanted to position himself in the same tradition and thus exhibited a self-conscious desire to be a part of architecture history. On his first trip around Europe with Colin Rowe, they saw a lot of the works of De Stijl architects like Willem Van Tijen, Jan Duiker and Gerrit Rietveld.[109] But, according to Eisenman, the person he identified with the most was Theo Van Doesburg, "because he started *De Stijl* magazine; he was the inspiration of a movement, etc."[110] So, it was natural that the Institute would work as a publishing house, with the production of the magazines *Oppositions* and later

[106] IAUS, Structure and Purpose of the IAUS.
[107] Somol, *Autonomy and ideology : positioning an avant-garde in America*. 68
[108] Beatriz Colomina, Interview with Peter Eisenman, Beatriz Colomina, Craig Buckley, and Urtzi Grau, *Clip, stamp, fold : the radical architecture of little magazines, 196X to 197X* (Barcelona: Actar, 2010). 261
[109] Peter Eisenman and Colin Rowe, "Interview with Peter Eisenman: The Last Grand Tourist: Travels with Colin Rowe," *Perspecta* 41 (2008), http://www.jstor.org/stable/40482322.
[110] Eisenman, in a debate about Oppositions in Colomina, Buckley, and Grau, *Clip, stamp, fold : the radical architecture of little magazines, 196X to 197X*.,

*Skyline* and the art journal *October*, as well as the book publishing program *Oppositions books.* The magazine *Oppositions* was started by Eisenman, Mario Gandelsonas and Kenneth Frampton in 1973 and published its last issue in 1983 because Eisenman wanted to concentrate on his professional design career. The magazine contained a wide range of disciplinary and theoretical discussions on architecture and, contrary to many of the little magazines of the historical avant-garde, did not deal with political issues. In her *IAUS: An Insider's Memoirs*, Suzanne Frank said that "not many of the institute's people were activists"[111] but they wanted to provoke and be against something. As discussed earlier, Eisenman's theoretical positions was not explicitly political, even though in more recent years he has expressed the inevitable political implications of architecture.[112] Mark Wigley stated bluntly that the institute existed to produce *Oppositions*, which in turn existed to print photographs of events and cocktail-parties.[113] This exemplifies the work at the IAUS, which by the mid-1970s was paving the way for an architectural elite, and it is described in a large portrait interview with Eisenman in the New York Magazine from 1988, which is worth quoting at length:

> It [the Institute] also assumed a central role in architectural politics. The intellectual anxiety of architects is such that it is not enough for them simply to put up buildings; they must also offer dazzling theoretical defenses of their projects. … If they [hot young architects] impressed the 'Instituti'—as Eisenman and his colleagues were called—they could count of exposure and recommendations that lead to university appointments and breakthrough commissions. This gave Eisenman a certain power over the careers of his peers. It was power that made him envied and resented. And it was power that fed the conspiratorial view of architecture: As one insider explains it, a large number of lucrative commissions and faculty positions are controlled by Philip Johnson (who gloomed onto the Institute in the mid-seventies) and his coterie, which includes Eisenman. Over dinners at the Century club, they decide who gets what. 'It's a cabal,' the conspiracy theorists whispers. 'There's a Mafia dimension to it.[114]

[111]Suzanne Frank, *IAUS: An Insider's Memoir* (New York: Self published, 2010). 48
[112] Peter Eisenman and Elisa Iturbe, *Lateness* (Princeton, New Jersey,Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).
[113] Agrest, "The Making of an Avant-Garde: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies 1967-1984."
[114] John Taylor, "Mr. In-Between, Deconstructing with Peter Eisenman," *New York Magazine*, 1988.52

This elitism is also apparent in a closed conference held in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1982 which was thought of as an event with an "air of mystery."[115] The participants were "major players" who were chosen since they were "serious about architecture," but they were all connected to the Institute in New York and were all part of the same network.[116] This network was described by Jaquelin Robertson in his introduction: "It helped underscore once again the strength and utility of a professional network that provides a psychic safety net against the changing fortunes of an all-too-fargile craft."[117] At the conference they discussed each other's projects, and even if there were disagreements among them, they were all part of the same architectural establishment.

It is apparent that the institute succeeded in attaining power in the architectural world, and as Kim Förster has exposed, they managed to construct a network of architects and theorists that later came to occupy positions in other art and architectural institutions, keeping the IAUS alive long after its dissolution in 1985.[118] However, for Eisenman, who was the networking master, the institute became too established, which is one of the reasons why he resigned as director in 1982. "It was no longer little, it was corporate, it is true. I did not mean for it to die but I knew I could not do it anymore. And I could not do my marriage anymore. I could not stay the institute; I had to change my life."[119] As was the case with dada and other avant-garde movements, when they were acknowledged as mainstream, these movements lost their status as avant-garde, but for this to be avoided, one had to continuously change in relation to the mainstream, or to the established conventions.

### 4.10 The Endless Criticality

So far, we have seen how Eisenman both created and was a part of what could be called the architectural avant-garde network. Now we return to the self-aware membership of the avant-garde and how it is linked with his theoretical position discussed in the previous chapters.

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[115] Introduction by Jaquelin Robertson in: Va School of Architecture University of Virginia Charlottesville, *The Charlottesville tapes : transcript of the conference at the University of Virginia School of Architecture, Charlottesville, Virginia November 12 and 13, 1982* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985). 7

[116] The participants were: Tadao Ando, Carlo Aymonino, Henry Cobb, Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, Hans Hollein, Arata Izozaki, Toyo Ito, Philip Johnson, Rem Koolhaas, Leon Krier, Richard Meier, Rafael Moneo, Cesar Pelli, Jaquelin Robertson, Kevin Roche, Paul Rudolph, Robert Seigel, Robert A.M. Stern, Stanley Tigerman, and O.M. Ungers.

[117] Ibid.

[118] The Charlotteville conference in 1982 is a telling example of the role Eisenman had in making an impact in American architecture.

[119] Clip, stamp, fold. Colomina, Buckley, and Grau, *Clip, stamp, fold : the radical architecture of little magazines, 196X to 197X*. 264

Eisenman noted that "architecture is usually defined as a series of norms at any given moment of time," which in turn means that the ontological understanding of architectural works changes over time in relation to established norms and conventions.[120] This leads Eisenman into stating that not only the norms are of interest, but the states of exception, which has resulted in the avant-garde obsession with the new. For instance, in his essay "Post-Functionalism" Eisenman argued for a formalism that disrupts social norms and disciplinary assumptions,[121] but this sense of the new was also present in his dissertation, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, where Eisenman was reluctant to propose a close-ended theory, and rather emphasized an open-ended possibility for change. This change connected the definition of architecture with the definition of the avant-garde.

In a talk titled "Autonomy and the avant-garde: The necessity of an avant-garde in America," Eisenman made the claim that an avant-garde in America did not exist until 1966 when Robert Venturi published his *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. The reason for this was that Venturi proposed a new definition of the autonomy of architecture, which Eisenman linked with the definition of the avant-garde.[122] This autonomy was not defined as a fixed state for architecture, but rather as a process of transgressing architecture's own time and space. What Eisenman was pointing at was that the search for autonomy did not establish timeless and true rules for architecture, but rather that this search was a critical project, which was essentially avant-garde. So, the point was not to find a universal language for architecture, but rather to establish the condition that the autonomy of architecture is the process of searching for the autonomy of architecture. This according to Eisenman was "always conditioned by a certain form of social practice. This gives to architecture a specific condition of autonomy unrelated to that of painting."[123] The idea of an avant-garde thus has for Eisenman a character of a social force, where the process is defined by always questioning the spirit of the time, the Zeitgeist and the conventions, "tropes" and "rhetoric" of architecture, which is "always relative to and contingent upon the historical conditions of any time."[124]

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[120] Eisenman, Architecture or Design: Wither the Discipline, talk given March 2010 at Cornell.
[121] Peter Eisenman, "Post-Functionalism," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976/2004).
[122] Eisenman, "Autonomy and the avant-garde: The necessity of an avant-garde in America", In Somol, *Autonomy and ideology : positioning an avant-garde in America*.,
[123] Ibid.
[124] Diagram diaries Peter Eisenman, *Diagram Diaries*, 1 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Universe Publishing, 1999)., 37

In his explanations of the importance of the *Zeitgeist*, Eisenman followed the same line of argument as with other universalizing or essential aspects. As mentioned, Eisenman acknowledged that it is a necessity for architecture to be "conditioned by a certain form of social practice," but for him the goal was, as discussed in the previous chapters, to displace architecture from these defining conditions.[125] He thus created a contradictory and unattainable goal for architects and established the possibility of an endless "criticality." For that reason, a goal is a misleading term, because it relies on the idea that there is a stable end. For Eisenman, it is the moments where architecture has changed that are of interest, and he emphasizes that the potential lies in "the states of exception" and the possibility of paradigm shifts.[126]

For instance, in his *Ten Canonical Buildings*, Eisenman's aim was to do a "close reading" of ten buildings which contained "critical architectural ideas." This was precisely an exposition of these states of exception.[127] As already mentioned in chapter two, these *canonical* buildings were not to be confused with *great* buildings which were, according to Eisenman, timeless. On the contrary, their status as canonical connected these buildings with specific moments in time. Eisenman writes that: "Each project discussed here represents a moment in architecture in which there is an acknowledgment of the past, a break with the past, and simultaneously a juncture with a possible future,"[128] and it is the break with the past which is fueled by the avant-garde. As has been apparent in the previous discussions, for Eisenman there is no stability for architecture. This is because we live in a "relativist world" where there is no truth or authenticity, only a desire for "absolute substance, something that is incontrovertibly real."[129] This desire is unattainable, and architecture must therefore continuously re-invent itself with no ambition of making things better. Stefano Corbo wrote that Eisenman's search for an impossible autonomy expressed a "pessimism of mankind and humanism"[130], thus confirming the nihilist attitude the neo-avant-garde is often characterized

[125] Peter Eisenman, "Autonomy and the avant-garde", in somol. Somol, *Autonomy and ideology : positioning an avant-garde in America*.
[126] Peter Eisenman, "Visions Unfolding: Architecture in the age of Electronic media," in *The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012*, ed. Mario Carpo (Chicester: Wiley, 2013). Also Expressed in Peter Eisenman, "Eisenman's Doubt," *Log*, no. 13/14 (2008), http://www.jstor.org/stable/41765247. where he is hoping for a paradigm shift.
[127] Peter Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950-2000* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008). 18
[128] Ibid. 19
[129] Peter Eisenman, "Architecture and The Problem of The Rhetorical Figure" in Eisenman, *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*.
[130] Stefano Corbo, *From Formalism to Weak Form: The Architecture and Philosophy of Peter Eisenman* (Routledge Ltd, 2016).16

with. In this sense the work of the avant-garde is thought of as a kind of natural law where architecture is supposed to change and evolve with no specific goal in mind. For Eisenman, the ontological definition of an architectural work is therefore closely connected to the work of the avant-garde since it was defined by how it changed and subverted established conventions.

### 4.11 Self-consciously Avant-garde

In her studies of the architectural profession in the period 1966-1985, the sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson noted that much of the architectural discipline is based on the ideological syllogism: "only architects produce architecture, architecture is an art, architects are necessary to produce art."[131] But since architecture is a heteronomous discipline with a canon consisting of buildings, which are products of both architectural knowledge and dependent on other specialists and clients, this desire for autonomy becomes unattainable. Consequently, according to Larson, this has created an occupational identity for architects with an unattainable belief in an idea of architecture as art, but where the profession is selling a service without believing that "pure architectural design" is possible.[132] This is manifested in the distinction between the avant-garde architects and the practicing architect doing service. Eisenman has, for instance, made the distinction between those architects having a project and those having a practice.[133] He defines it as: the architect having a project "defines the world around him or her," while the architect with a practice is defined by the world, and that the project "is always a critique of the status quo of the discipline of architecture."[134] This corresponds with Eisenman's emphasis on breaks with the past, the break with conventions and subsequent paradigmatic shifts. Accordingly, the avant-garde architect with a project is perceived as responsible for the development of the discourse. The distinction between project and practice, or between the avant-garde architects and the profession doing service, could also be compared with Cottington's distinction between the professional artist and the avant-garde "alternative professional," or with Schumacher's distinction between the mainstream and the avant-garde, who both ascribe a crucial defining role to the avant-garde.

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[131]Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the postmodern facade : architectural change in late twentieth-century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). 5
[132] Ibid. 16
[133] Peter Eisenman, "Peter Eisenman: "Project or Practice?"" (2011). *School of Architecture Lectures Series*. 5.
[134] Ibid.

In Eisenman's understanding of architecture history as a history of change, the avant-garde are given this crucial role. Within this understanding of history, he has tended to record projects rather than the practice of architecture.[135] For Eisenman, the essential aspects in these projects were how they contained new ideas about architecture and not how they introduced new functional or technological solutions. This meant that a project was marked by its ability to question and discuss the way architecture dealt with its own signification and meaning. The questioning was not only done through the design of buildings, but also by writing books and treatises. In a debate on the end of theory, we get an exposition of Eisenman's attitude regarding the legacy of some of the most prominent architects through history.

> Alberti wrote *De Re Aedificatoria* in the fifteenth century, and we wouldn't think much of Alberti's four or five buildings if he hadn't written that book. The same, I would argue, applies to Palladio, because if you go to see these villas one-on-one and you see the reality, you say "huh"? But his book, the quattro libri, is stunningly important. The same with Le Corbusier; there are a lot of white houses, but aside from one or two, who would think of Le Corbusier if he hadn't written *Vers une architecture*? Robert Venturi, for sure, nobody would remember. Maybe for one house, but he wrote *Complexity and Contradiction*. Built work is not the only thing about architecture. And the reason why we have a discipline, the reason why we're here studying, is not to learn how to build better, or that built work encompasses the only important condition that exists in architecture. Built work can be theoretical, but sometimes books are more important than buildings.[136]

The question of what makes these architects great architects is answered by their ability to write and think, and in their ability to position architecture in relation to the discipline of architecture. Eisenman's emphasis on writing and verbal behavior rather than the craft and skill of designing buildings is apparent. "I had intellectual envy, I felt people who thought, who could write and speak, were important people. Most architects had few brains. They were idiots basically. I didn't want to be like that."[137] The contrarian attitude, which enables the states of exception combined with the ability to write and think, is a characteristic that Eisenman has both valued in his idols and strived for himself.

This brings us to Eisenman's self-awareness, which is not only expressed by the admiration for the avant-garde and the desire to be part of an avant-garde himself, but also by

[135] Ibid.
[136] Peter Eisenman, The End of Theory, a discussion with Kurt Foster, Philip Ursprong, and Jacques Herzog
[137] Taylor, "Mr. In-Between, Deconstructing with Peter Eisenman."50

his ambition to make an architecture about architecture.[138] The way in which his architecture points to its own processes of signification and the relationships between form and meaning is as self-aware as the desire to be avant-garde. As Peter Bürger pointed out, this characteristic is typical of the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s, but what separated Eisenman from just wanting to be avant-garde is the way in which his theoretical position supported the critical attitude. Eisenman's interest in deconstruction and other critical and transgressive theories is understandable in the light of this attitude.

### 4.12 The Avant-garde Dependency

What I have shown so far in this chapter is that Eisenman not only has been a member of the avant-garde, but that his theoretical position depends on the concept of the avant-garde. Eisenman's assumption is that architectural works are intellectually understood, and that their merit is determined by how they address and make a critique of architectural meaning. This is the underlying motivation for Eisenman's deconstructive, destabilizing project, where his architectural works self-consciously question the conventional meanings of architecture. All these efforts depend on the assumptions not only that these meanings have a fixed and abstract existence, but also that someone has the capacity to fix and change these meanings and this someone is the avant-garde. The avant-garde is thus the concept that underwrites Eisenman's claims about meanings, meanings which he in turn deconstructs. Meanings are meanings insofar as they are endorsed and constructed by the avant-garde, otherwise they would not be there to be deconstructed, or at least their deconstruction would be irrelevant for the architect's avant-garde status.

In "The End of Art" Arthur Danto discussed how during the 20th century the visual arts turned from continuous progression of the imitation of reality to an inward and self-conscious questioning of what art is.[139] For Danto this resulted in the impossibility of giving sufficient and necessary conditions for something to be a work of art, but he nevertheless provided a definition. He meant that works of art are "embodied meanings," and that "the artwork is a material object, some of whose properties belong to the meaning, and some do not. What the viewer must do is interpret the meaning-bearing properties in such a way as to

[138] This is described in Peter Eisenman, "Aspects of Modernism: Maison Dom-ino and the Self-Referential Sign," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Print, 1980/2004).

[139] Arthur Danto, "The End of Art," in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisment of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press. 1986)

grasp the intended meaning they embody."[140] The problem is thus what these meanings are and how they are "embodied" in the work. How do we know what the correct meaning might be? Even if Danto was reluctant to endorse the strong position that something was a work of art if the Artworld decrees that it is, he relied on the Artworld recognizing the meanings that a work of art embodies. As discussed, this is equivalent to Eisenman's dependency on the avant-garde for his assumptions on architectural meaning.

For Danto, the members of the Artworld did not necessarily have the capacity to fix meanings as abstract entities, but Eisenman's effort to deconstruct the architectural meanings suggests that he assumed that the architectural avant-garde had this capacity. If these meanings were to be deconstructed, the avant-garde had to construct these meanings first. The avant-garde is thus the answer to the pressing question about who fixes architectural meaning, as well as the very effort to criticize and deconstruct them. These architectural meanings in the form of abstract artifacts emerging from the avant-garde behave like Popperian third world objects. The architectural avant-garde are thus assumed to have status as something more than just a social phenomenon and are treated by Eisenman like an abstract force that is granted the capacity to both establish, criticize, deconstruct, and re-establish architectural meanings.

Even if Eisenman treats the avant-garde as this abstract force, it is the consensus among the members of the avant-garde that establishes the accepted meanings and the ways in which these meanings are deconstructed. This means that the theoretical questions about the avant-garde and the meanings which they endorse are resolved on the level of institutionalized social frameworks. The establishment of the IAUS and the building of what Kim Förster called "Peter Eisenman's network" settled this defining power and selected the members of the architectural avant-garde. This was not explicitly orchestrated, but it placed Eisenman in a position where he could perform his continuous critique of the conventions of architectural form-making. The architectural meanings that Eisenman deconstructs are thus the meanings that are accepted by the people that he considered to be members of the avant-garde, the group of architects and architectural theorists to which he belonged himself.

In a debate with the New Urbanists Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Eisenman said: "I am really interested in the possibility today of making a mess". This confirms the desire to destabilize any stability for architecture, and thus also his underlying avant-gardism. The point is that this avant-gardism is not only an interest for the new, but that

[140] Arthur Danto, *What Art is*, (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2013) 37

Eisenman's theoretical project depends on it. As discussed in Chapter 2, if meanings were just in the minds of individual human beings, the effort that Eisenman makes to displace, criticize, and deconstruct these meanings would hardly be necessary. To say that a building element like a column has unstable meanings would then merely follow the assumptions that different individual human beings are attributing different meanings to the same column. This is not a particularly interesting observation. Only if these meanings are assumed to be Platonic, abstract, and immaterial, can the need to deconstruct, destabilize, and criticize them be taken to be a far more profound project. So, when Eisenman makes buildings that criticize the established rules, conventions, and meanings of the discipline, he relies on the rules, conventions and meanings that are accepted by the avant-garde. The avant-garde is thus responsible for fixing the meanings that need to be deconstructed and the meanings that Eisenman seeks to deconstruct are thus products of the avant-garde.

# Conclusion
# PETER EISENMAN AND THE GAME OF ARCHITECTURE

## A Formalism without Form

This research project started out as an investigation of theories of form in architecture, and especially the development of these theories in the second half of 20th century architectural theory. Peter Eisenman was chosen because of his formalist leanings and his standing as a major player in the community of architects and architectural theorists. The expectation was that the analysis of Eisenman's theories could provide an understanding of how form was justified in our recent history. However, by taking the problem of ontology as a starting point, it became obvious that Eisenman's formalism was not about form understood as the visually perceived characteristics of a building, such as shape and color. Eisenman defined architecture as an intellectual activity, essentially about ideas or meanings, which meant that when Eisenman discussed form, it was the meaning of form that was of interest. More precisely, it was what was implied by the shape and form of a building. His consistent position was that architecture was distinguished from the physical building, and the work of architecture had to be read and interpreted from what we are seeing. The basis of form, the underlying justificatory criteria for formal choices, was thus based on reading and interpretation. This did not mean that any reading was as good as any other, which led Eisenman to distinguish between architectural and other kinds of meaning. Primacy was given to architectural meaning, and the question was who or what defined this meaning. As this thesis has shown, this was closely connected to Eisenman's assumptions on the ontology of architectural works, since he has treated architectural meaning and a work of architecture as two sides of the same coin.

Throughout his career Eisenman has opposed the idea of the architect being a creative form-making individual, but he has always idealized the singular genius architect, like Le Corbusier, Andrea Palladio, and Giuseppe Terragni. This does not mean that he idealized their ability to produce beautiful, intriguing, or stunning buildings. He rather idealized their ability to question the reigning conventions, how they infused their work with ambiguous ideas, or how their work changed the discipline of architecture. Consequently, Eisenman usually positioned the architect as someone who finds ideas and meanings or finds the ways in which

architecture could express these ideas and meanings. This means that primacy is given to how the architect uses shapes and forms with a presumably "certain" meaning in a new way in order to displace or disturb the very same meanings, and thus push the discipline of architecture forward. Eisenman never explicitly expresses this position, but as the discussions presented in this dissertation point out, he thinks of the architect as a discoverer of meanings emerging from society, culture, or a significant part of this society or culture. This does not mean that the architect was not supposed to design buildings, but rather that the important aspect was how shapes and forms could express and subsequently displace meanings. For Eisenman, these meanings emerge from the loosely defined group of individueals which could be called the avant-garde, which is the spearhead of the discipline of architecture at any given time. The meanings of an architectural work or element emerge from avant-garde and its ontology is cemented in a way similar to a Popperian third world object. So, even if the avant-garde in itself is not defined as an abstract Platonic entity, the meanings are treated as abstract Platonic forces governing architecture. If architectural meanings are treated as abstract givens, they should be thought of as unchangeable, but for Eisenman these forces could be continuously altered and changed by the avant-garde. This leaves us with the peculiar situation that architectural meaning is defined ontologically as abstract and Platonic, and that architecture is defined by how it transgresses its abstract and Platonic meanings. Eisenman's ontological assumptions in turn enabled an endless criticism of the meanings that buildings acquire.

The aim of the four chapters has been to investigate the connection between Eisenman's general ontological stance on architecture and how meaning has been used and questioned in his specific architectural works. Further, the intention of the last chapter was to seek possible explanations of the problems that occurred during this investigation. For Eisenman, it was difficult to predict the complex and often paradoxical consequences of his theoretical speculations. And often, in his sprawling theories the aim was precisely to point out the unforeseen and unpredictable ways in which architecture worked. So, the question that needed to be asked was what was motivating these often-wanted contradictions throughout Eisenman's career. Gevork Hartoonian called Eisenman's project a "radical challenge to architecture as an institution, denying it any purpose, yet subjecting it to the very process of such a denial."[1] This "radical challenge," or the continuous questioning of any stable definition, made it possible for Eisenman to stay relevant for more than 60 years. The

[1] Gevork Hartoonian, *Architecture and spectacle : a critique* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012).

engagement with the latest trends, the testing of new theoretical approaches, the borrowing of terms and methods from literary criticism, philosophy or other fields, and the shifts in his architecture from angular structures of posts, beams, walls, and slabs, to ground works, and later smooth wavy shapes, all mark this ability to change, which is grounded in his theoretical position.

Even if Eisenman has never been explicit, he seems extremely conscious about the primacy of the avant-garde and their ability to push the discipline of architecture forward. As such, it works as an explanatory backdrop in order to understand Eisenman's overall theoretical project, where architecture was defined as what the architects do, and what the architects should be doing at any certain time was defined by the avant-garde, the spearhead of the discipline.

**Architecture, not Philosophy**

Peter Eisenman is an architect, and not a philosopher, historian, or literary critic. Even though he has contributed extensively to architecture theory, his main task has been the design of buildings. In a retrospective comment about his career, he said that going into Jungian psychoanalysis in the 1980s made him realize that he was an architect or a builder, which psychologically was what he wanted to be.[2] At the time Eisenman felt that he "had to get into reality," and that "otherwise I would have lived in my head."[3] So, even if his desire to be an architect was psychologically repressed before his venture into psychoanalysis, he eventually realized that being an architect was more important than being a theorist. With this acknowledgement, it is worth recognizing that architectural theory undertaken by architects has philosophical shortcomings, and that these shortcomings may indicate that the primacy is given to the design of buildings.

As discussed, Eisenman's theories have philosophical problems. The inconsistency, the ambiguities, the obfuscation, and the amount of guessing one must do to make sense of the theories, all make it apparent that Eisenman's aim is to design buildings, and not to develop a complete philosophy of architecture. This means that the underlying assumptions one must adopt in order to make certain claims are seldom stated. Whether this is a result of ignorance, lack of philosophical training, or deliberate inconsistency is not easily determined. But the lack of philosophical consistency and clear argumentation may point to the fact that it

[2].Peter Eisenman and Luis Fernandez-Galiano, "Peter Eisenman: "Psychoanalysis helped me to become a builder."," in *Eisenman Deconstruido*, Architectura Viva: Retratos (Madrid: Architectura Viva, 2021).
[3] Ibid.

is the architectural works that hold primacy, and not the theoretical writings. The legacy of Eisenman's built and unbuilt architectural works thus stands firmer than the legacy of his writings. Eisenman still holds the position as a theorist-architect, and his critical writings on architecture have clearly been innovative and influential. But his goal was to make a critical architecture, meaning that it was the architectural works rather than the writings that was supposed to hold the critical ideas. For Eisenman, the distinction between architectural meaning and other kinds of meaning, discussed in Chapter 2, indicates that the making of architecture is ultimately about giving shape and form to buildings. Since Eisenman's aim was to criticize meanings, it was preferably done through the architectural works.

It is worth acknowledging that architecture in general is different from philosophy and that architecture is made according to different rules. Even if one of the aims of this dissertation has been to scrutinize and discuss Eisenman's philosophical underpinnings, one must remember that he is an architect with philosophical ambitions, rather than a philosopher writing about architecture. This means that Eisenman designed and made buildings that contained philosophical or theoretical points and arguments. The aim was not that these buildings were supposed to discuss fundamental epistemological, ethical, or metaphysical problems, but rather that they supposedly discussed architectural problems. Ultimately, Eisenman's aim was to design buildings that were about architecture. This resulted in a continuous search for autonomy, where the architecture became self-referential by addressing the codes and conventions of the profession.

Since architectural works, both built and unbuilt, consist of shapes and forms in space and not words, these works require more careful interpretation. This could of course be disputed. If one takes the Derridean mantra that "everything is text", then the reading of architecture is as difficult as the reading of texts. However, Eisenman's projects, in their often-intended ambiguousness, had unintended consequences. For instance, his early houses, with their intended questioning of the nature of form and relationships between form and function and form and meaning, were exhibited together with the architectural works of Charles Gwathmey, Richard Meier, Michael Graves and John Hejduk because of their stylistic similarities. The white sculptural compositions of simple elements like posts, beams, slabs, walls, frames, and grids, looked like early modernist buildings, and did not necessarily question the nature of form and the relationships between form and function or form and meaning. The same could be said about Mark Wigley's and Philip Johnson's exhibition of Deconstructivist architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1988. Eisenman's work together with Bernhard Tschumi's was explicitly based, or was claimed to be based, on

Derrida's thinking but Tshumi and Eisenman's works were exhibited with stylistically similar works by Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Coop Himmelblau, Daniel Libeskind and Rem Koolhaas. Even if Wigley and Eisenman later acknowledged that the exhibition had nothing to do with deconstruction, it shows the difficulty of attributing different content to architectural works when they look similar. This also points to the tendency to attribute meaning to certain elements regardless of their intended meanings, and according to their conventional meanings. In some ways it legitimizes Eisenman's overall project and his need to criticize and displace established conventions and given architectural meaning, but it also points to his inability to see that architecture could be designed according to any other principles.

**The Aesthetic Blind Spot**

As mentioned, together with ontology, the main theme of this dissertation is meaning, and not form as initially thought. Since Eisenman opposed any meaning, he has been considered a formalist, but as we have seen, his alternative to meaning is not form, but rather to displace or seeking to displace meaning, which in turn makes all architecture about meaning. What this puzzling consequence of Eisenman's thinking uncovers is one of his blind spots, which makes him an unconventional formalist if he could be defined as such. This blind spot is aesthetics, and Eisenman rejected it early in his career, almost without considering it again. In his early works, the all too human, individual, and experiential connotations that follow any discussion of aesthetics, were deemed by Eisenman too subjective to provide a logical and universal basis for architecture. In his later works, aesthetics was just a matter of taste, and was therefore uninteresting.

By aesthetics I here mean the attribution of aesthetic qualities such as beauty or ugliness to a work of architecture. In Eisenman's critique of architecture's meaning and the ways it represents function, structure, or any other content, he could have returned to pure aesthetic formalism, but it seems that this kind of aesthetics was not what he was after. The question is thus why aesthetic concern was so easily neglected. A reason may be that Eisenman took it for granted that architecture was always read and interpreted, and that a direct aesthetic experience is impossible. In "Misreading Peter Eisenman" he made the point that in architecture, the intelligible and the sensible had always been conflated, and that perception and conception was the same thing.[4] However, in House VI Eisenman attempted to

[4] Peter Eisenman, "Misreading Eisenman," in *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963-1988*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987/2004). 219

separate these two by making a "perceptual system dislocated from the conceptual system." This was not to say that one was supposed to have a purely disinterested aesthetic experience based on perception, but the point was rather to make the separation of the two systems apparent. The interpretation of the architectural work and the recognition of the two "systems" required that the viewer knew the conventions of architecture, and that the design of House VI was making a critique of these conventions. Again, we return to Eisenman's fundamental definition of architecture as ideas and meanings and note that he was both affirming and refuting the necessary relationship between meaning and architecture. The point is that there was no escape from this condition, so the only strategy was to displace architectural meaning. Pure aesthetic formalism was thus an impossibility because Eisenman took it for granted that the perception and interpretation of architectural works are inseparable. At the same time, interpretation always changes, and the point was to make use of this fact, which in the end was the only fact.

**Absolute Inessentiality**

In his work against function, against meaning, against aesthetics, or against any other factor being the essential aspect of architecture, Eisenman ended with a somewhat contradictory position. According to experimental artist Robert Rauschenberg, the concept of his own art was that it had no concept.[5] The same phrasing could be used to describe Eisenman's architecture, meaning that its only essence was that it had no essence. The contradiction of this essential in-essentialness resulted in the self-reflexive and self-refuting task for architecture. Eisenman defined it as "the essence of the act of architecture is the dislocation of an ever-reconstituting metaphysics of architecture."[6] So, according to Eisenman the act of architecture, what architecture is supposed to do, is to point to the everchanging overarching definitions of what it must do and how it means. This is both a deeply pessimistic and a liberating view of architecture. It is deeply pessimistic because it denies architecture any societal, functional, or aesthetic value, and it is liberating because one does not need to account for those functional, societal, or aesthetic values. However, it does not make architecture easy.

If the success of an architectural work is evaluated based on its capacity to dislocate the "ever-reconstituting metaphysics of architecture", this means that one has to know what

[5] This is quoted in Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021).
[6] Eisenman, "Misreading Eisenman." 209

the current "metaphysics of architecture" is. It is not enough to create something new. This is acknowledged by Eisenman, who said that it is a great error to believe that "whatever is new is necessarily a dislocation."[7] As discussed throughout the dissertation, what Eisenman was after was architectural meaning. Therefore, the ability to both make and read or interpret architecture requires substantial knowledge about the field of architecture and the conventional meanings which supposedly emerge from the discipline, society, or culture at large. Then the design of buildings thus becomes a self-referential game. A game where the rules keep changing, and for Eisenman, it is the avant-garde who make the rules, but not necessarily in a conscious way.

As discussed, Eisenman treats the conventional architectural meanings as a given, a necessary force that emerges from the avant-garde, but since it emerges from the avant-garde it is not stable. As such, meaning could be said to be attributed to architecture or elements of architecture by certain individuals or groups of individuals. If we were to stop here, the claim that meanings change is just commonsensical and does not need all the effort that Eisenman has made in order to demonstrate the point. Since meanings are attributed by individuals or groups of individuals, they would be different if the individuals or groups of individuals change, but it seems that for Eisenman, when meanings are attributed to works or elements of architecture, they are bestowed with an abstract, overarching and essential character. Eisenman thus suggests that there are correct meanings of architecture, and that these are the meanings that the avant-garde assumes and endorses. At the least, he has the impression that a substantial part of the discipline of architecture, as well as everyone else, believes that this is the case. Consequently, the task of questioning and displacing the assumed essential meanings becomes the most important task for architects.

Eisenman has throughout his career been interested in what the architecture of architecture is. This has resulted in an extremely critical position on the role of the architect as well as on architecture in general. In all his ambiguousness, he has revealed a strong anti-foundational position, where it was impossible to define the architecture of architecture, or architecture's ontology. Eisenman's project has thus been a thoroughly negative one, where the goal was to break down any essential claims about what architecture is, should do, or should look like. This resembles the famous quote attributed to a senior army officer in the Vietnam war who said, "it was necessary to destroy the village in order to save it."[8] For

[7] Ibid.

[8] The origin of this quote is disputed, and it may not have been said by any army official at all, but it nevertheless works as an illustration. See Stephen L. Carter, "Destroying a Quote's History in Order to save it," Bloomberg,

Eisenman, the destruction of architecture was not literally to destroy architecture, but to destroy the assumed fixed meanings, which in turn was what architecture was all about.

This dissertation ultimately confirms the view that architecture in the second half of the 20th century developed into a form of art for the initiated few, especially for a branch of architects and theorists operating within the American East Coast. Influenced by French post-structuralist theory, the avant-garde developed a jargon and a way to drape architectural works in a veil of often incomprehensible theory. Peter Eisenman was among the most prolific architects of this group and era, and for him, architecture was not about designing buildings that contributed to the betterment of society, but about making transgressive architecture-objects that questioned aspects and conventions that only a few would have the knowledge to comprehend. It all rested on the belief that architecture was initially about how buildings transmitted some kind of meaning. The correct meanings were the ones that the avant-garde endorsed, and it was the avant-garde that subsequently held the power to attribute new meanings to architectural works.

February 9, 2018. https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-02-09/destroying-a-quote-s-history-in-order-to-save-it?leadSource=uverify%20wall

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