I, Lee Aviv, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Architecture in Architecture.

It is entitled:
The Classical Unconscious: A Critique of the Paradoxical Design Projects of Peter Eisenman

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Committee chair: Nnamdi Elleh, Ph.D.
The Classical Unconscious
A Critique of the Paradoxical Design Projects of Peter Eisenman

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the design trajectories of architect Peter Eisenman from 1963 to the present. The point of departure for the study is his seminal essay “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, The End of the End,” which he published in 1984. It will be shown in this thesis that although one might understand the essay as Eisenman’s anti-Renaissance design manifesto that will guide the production of contemporary architectural practices, the objective of the essay was not necessarily to completely eliminate Renaissance design knowledge from contemporary practices. Eisenman declared in the essay that the practices and study of architecture from the fifteenth century to the present were founded on three fictions: (1) the fiction of representation, (2) the fiction of reason, and (3) the fiction of history. After unveiling these fictions, Eisenman set for himself the mission of researching, writing, and practicing architecture in a manner that would present new methodologies for building research and production that would not include the three fictions by interrogating what he saw as codified belief systems in architectural practices and education.

In order to explore how Eisenman set out to dispel the “fictions” he observed in Western architectural practices and how that observation has guided his design over the years, this study adopted the following steps: Firstly, it examined Eisenman’s designs for his early house projects (1967-1975); his “cities of artificial excavation” projects (1978-1988); and his Aronoff Center for Design and Art at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio (1988-1996). Secondly, this research analyzed the discourse surrounding Eisenman’s design projects in the 1980s in order to learn whether his change in design methodology at this time moved away from the institutionalization of precepts—“the fiction of reason”—he
believed were derived from the classical tradition. Thirdly, it analyzed Eisenman’s select writings in the 1990s as well as his competition entry for the Rebstock Master Plan in Frankfurt Germany (1990-1992), and the design for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in World War II, in Berlin, Germany (1997-2005), to determine how his design projects eliminated or confirmed “the fiction of history” which he believes were derived from the classical tradition of architectural practices.

It is observed that certain ideological design consistencies that were invested in making Renaissance design traditions available to contemporary architectural practices without representing the ideas in the visual forms favored by that tradition emerged in Eisenman’s writings over the years. However, when he applied his ideological rhetoric into the design of structures, the outcomes of the designs were unconsciously paradoxical because they recouped the three fictions—representation, reason, and history—which he wanted to eliminate from Western architectural studies and practices. Based on these findings, this thesis proposes that the more Eisenman attempted—either in writing or in design—to move away from what he saw as the fictions of the classical tradition in modern architectural practices and studies, the more he unconsciously and paradoxically confirmed the role of the classical traditions in his own contemporary architectural designs. It is argued that only through reinterpretations of classical architectural elements is Eisenman able to avoid reproducing an architecture that repeats the links to that tradition.
# Table of Contents

Abstract  
Table of Contents  

1. Introduction  
   1.1 Premise of the Thesis  
   1.2 Eisenman’s Background in the Architectural Context of the Post-World War II Era  
   1.3 Theoretical Background and Literature Review  
   1.4 Scope of Research / Organization of the Work  

2. The Fiction of Representation: The Forms and Styles in Houses I-VI, the Cities of Artificial Excavation, and the Aronoff Center for Design and Art  
   2.1 Houses I-VI, 1967-1975  
   2.2 The “Cities of Artificial Excavation,” 1978-1988  
   2.3 The Aronoff Center for Design and Art, 1988-1996  
   2.4 Synthesis of Findings  

3. The Fiction of Reason: Reactions to the Formation of Truth in Eisenman’s Theoretical Discourse in the 1980s  
   3.1 Eisenman’s Criticism and Reconsideration of Houses I-VI  
   3.2 Jacques Derrida’s Influence and Criticism of Eisenman’s Work  

4. The Fiction of History: The Blurring of Type-Forms in Eisenman’s Discourse and Design Projects in the 1990s  
   4.1 The Architectural Climate of 1990s  
   4.2 Rebstockpark Master Plan, Frankfurt, Germany, 1990-1992  
   4.3 Proposal of a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany, 1997-2005  
   4.4 Design and Development of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe  
   4.5 Criticisms of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe  

5. Conclusion  

Works Cited
1. Introduction
1.1 Premise of the Thesis

The premise of this thesis is: In the essay “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, The End of the End” (1984), Peter Eisenman was struggling with how he would reinterpret modern and contemporary architecture with the hope that he would radically impact how built objects were constructed and realized for our time without burdening his designs with elements from the classical tradition which were handed down to the modern era from the Renaissance period. Although this essay is not the first publication by Eisenman, it nonetheless is a turning point in his career where he finally declared his philosophical and architectural manifesto. Thus, his earlier publications were to some extent precursors for him to clarify the points he stated in this essay.

For example, Eisenman’s efforts to reinterpret modern architecture for our time were visible in the experimental house design projects and in his early writings, which include *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* (1963). Interestingly, we can trace his efforts to interpret Renaissance architectural practices for our time to his Ph.D. dissertation titled *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* where he describes the traditional conception of architectural form as visual and perceptual. In this early writing, Eisenman argues that social, economic, and technological changes have produced an environment that challenges the potential for a significant order in architecture, and thus contemporary architecture has begun to take refuge in mannerism and expressionism.¹ To Eisenman, this refuge produces a socially irrelevant architecture; this is an argument he later clarified in his writings on the challenge that contemporary mediation brings to architecture, and later

he relates it to the problems of the “fiction of representation.” In order to address the problem of the fiction of representation, he proposed a conceptual method of reading architectural design that is ordered by a system of generic form and the interrelation of formal elements in individual buildings such as volume, mass, surface, and movement. While Eisenman focuses this conceptual method on formal analyses of works from the Modern Movement—specifically selected works by Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, and Giuseppe Terragni—his search for order, consistency, harmony, and a generic architectural language in those works was restored by drawing from the design processes of the Renaissance. Surprisingly, he suggests that contemporary designers can continue Renaissance design ideals without relying on the prior knowledge and the relevance of the forms of visual representation from the Renaissance era. Thus, this early writing can be seen as Eisenman’s attempt to validate Renaissance approaches to building design on the grounds that we can learn from it. However, in the same text, he was hypothesizing that although we may learn from the Renaissance, it might be much more appropriate to interrogate what that knowledge would mean in design that is directed at people in contemporary culture and social experiences.

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2 Ibid., p. 57-83.
3 Eisenman later shows that this method of formal analysis applies as well to the volumes of Andrea Palladio’s 16th Century villas. Anthony Vidler, “Palladio Reassessed by Eisenman,” The Architectural Review, October 23, 2012.
4 Architect Mario Gandelsonas suggests that in classical architecture, the subject and object were made possible by representation; modern architecture replaced classical representation with an ideology stressing the importance of relationships in which the subject determines the object; thus Eisenman can be seen to have replaced representation with communication, the subject acting as the inventor and tester of a syntactic process. Mario Gandelsonas, “From Structure to Subject: The Formation of an Architectural Language,” in Peter Eisenman, House X, New York: Rizzoli, 1985, p. 7-31.
This endeavor to challenge or expand the formal basis of architecture can be seen in Eisenman’s attempts to make processes of design legible in Houses I, II, III, IV, and VI. In the series of the experimental house designs, although he maintains modern architecture’s abstraction of form and mass, and although he divorced the forms of the houses from their intended social relationships, his use of coherent processes in the designs can be seen to continue a desire for objectivity rooted in the Renaissance design traditions. In addition to the experimental building designs, in the essay “From Golden Lane to Robin Hood Gardens,” which he published in 1973, Eisenman began to confront the neo-classical tendencies of modern and post-modern architectural practices as obscuring critical validity by being tied to the past through the formal and stylistic application of classicist and expressionist elements, rather than reinterpreting them for an indeterminate future. While the term “post-modern” has a variety of meanings, it refers here—and will refer in this document unless otherwise stated—to the style of pastiche post-modernism made popular by Robert Venturi and his followers beginning in the 1960s. In addition, the term “modern” with reference to architecture unless otherwise noted refers in this document to the abstract characteristics and ideology derived from the body of works of the masters of the Modern Movement in early twentieth century Western culture.

In “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, The End of the End,” Eisenman was finally able to articulate his position on contemporary architectural history,

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5 Eisenman’s work can as well be considered under the title of deconstructivist or poststructuralist post-modernism in the sense that it arose out of the same cultural condition as pastiche post-modernism characterized by the end of master narratives and the fragmentation of the subject. For example, this is described in Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism, 1945 to the Present, Thames and Hudson, 2011, p. 1984. Gandelsonas describes the former as being concerned with the underlying structure of architectural language, and the latter as being concerned primarily with the complexity of the architectural sign. House X, p. 8.
theory, and practices. He believed that from the fifteenth century, architectural practices consisted of three fictions that were derived from “abstract system[s] of relations,” and the practices continued throughout the Modern Movement period to the present era. He grounded this essay in the Renaissance—a crucial period that presents a shift towards a belief in a humanistic scientific and artistic progress, and thus the beginnings of the modern age of reason—which can be seen to later influence modern architecture’s fascination with the machine. Although modern architectural practices evolved from the 18th Century with the invention of iron, and later with the development of concrete and glass in building technology, he suggests that the foundations laid down from the Renaissance continued to direct the manner in which architectural education and practices are conducted. The Renaissance presents a break with the past in which tradition was replaced with a belief in change and the new, hence the term “modern,” generally meaning “of the present.” In architectural practices, the ideas of the Renaissance, the concept of the rebirth of classical Greco-Roman culture, derived from antiquity. The practice originated in Italy in the 15th Century, and it later spread throughout the Western world where it was

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7 Ibid., p. 153.
8 Philosopher Stephen Toulmin argues that the origins of modernity presented not so much an unrefuted belief in rationalism and certainty (later influencing positivism) but can be located at practical and humanist writer Michel de Montaigne’s exemplification of the 15th Century climate that “let readers be skeptically tolerant of uncertainty, ambiguity, and diversity of opinion” rather than the common location of modernity’s development at the theological rationalism of Rene Descarte. Stephen Toulmin, “What is the Problem About Modernity?” Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity, New York: Free Press, 1990, p. 5-44.
9 This is described in Hubert-Jan Henket and Hilde Heynen, Back From Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers., 2002, p. 9-17.
received either with acceptance or skepticism. The classical tradition was attractive to the people of the Renaissance due to a number of reasons. Architectural historian James Curl describes the classical ideal as characterized by “clarity, completeness, symmetry, deceptive simplicity, repose, and harmonious proportions; it is associated with civilized life, perfection, taste, restraint, and serenity.” In a way, these characteristics were intended to represent political stability that in the Western World were usually associated with the Greek and Roman systems of government, democracy, and knowledge. However, Eisenman wanted to detach such idealized attributes from contemporary architectural practices because they were never realized in full in the classical times if one looked at history critically, nor in the immediate past twentieth century that was traumatized by two World Wars. We know that architects often use building elements as metaphors and symbols to represent abstract ideas and concepts. The people of the Renaissance represented abstract constructs like democracy, social stability, knowledge, and prosperity with systems of columns known as the orders—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, as well as Tuscan and Composite, which derived from the Doric and Corinthian orders. The architectural elements are defined by ideal proportion, details, and rectangular or

10 A.D.F. Hamlin, A Text-Book of the History of Architecture, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1904, p. 282-321. Art historians generally refer to the "breakdown of Classical decorum" as Mannerism. See for example, Spiro Kostof, “The Renaissance: Ideal and Fad,” in A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 403-430. While what is described in the following chapters may be initially received as falling under the title of Mannerism, it hoped that Eisenman’s work is described not as falling under the category of the “non-classical,” but rather as contradictorily recouping and dismantling elements associated with the classical, and ultimately confirming the role of the classical. For more on the problems of the common definition of Mannerism as non-classical and the roots of this stylistic categorization in the Renaissance, see Ernst Gombrich, Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 1-10, 81-106.
centralized floor plans that are embodied in the golden section. When the rules of the golden section are applied in architectural design, plans and elevations that were derived from simple geometric shapes were divided mathematically according to the belief that sees the human body as the most beautiful representative of object due to its divine proportions.\(^\text{12}\) The Renaissance and classical design knowledge that interests Eisenman and which he wanted to eliminate in contemporary design includes the formal characteristics of axially, symmetry, and a hierarchy of parts. However, he inadvertently recoups them in his work. Some of the symbolic characteristics of classical and modern architecture which Eisenman in different instances wanted to break away from, but which he paradoxically continues to reinforce in his design are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical Architecture</th>
<th>Modern Architecture</th>
<th>Eisenman’s Architecture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Column as vertical post carrying lintel w/arched construction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Column and beam construction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Column and beam construction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form is derived from orders (antiquity); hierarchies of parts express structural function</td>
<td>Form is derived from structural function of new materials; clarity of parts and consistency in plan and section</td>
<td>Form is detached from structural function; clarity of parts is inconsistent in plan and section; derived from desire to express process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiality and symmetry in plan and elevation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Asymmetry in plan and elevation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Axiality and symmetry in plan and elevation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form represents perfection</td>
<td>Form follows programmatic function (economy and representation of use)</td>
<td>Form is manipulated to detach representation of perfection from experience; programmatic function is secondary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion and harmony</th>
<th>Proportion and harmony</th>
<th>Proportion without harmony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form reflects ideals of taste and beauty; representation of human form as divine</td>
<td>Form designed for human use and scale in experience</td>
<td>Form is fragmented and manipulated to detach it from beauty, and human use and scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verticality</th>
<th>Horizontality</th>
<th>Verticality and horizontality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form consistently and iconically reflects political stability</td>
<td>Form consistently expresses structural spans enabled by steel and reinforced concrete</td>
<td>Form inconsistently breaks continuity and linearity of expression of political and structural function</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permanence</th>
<th>Permanence</th>
<th>Impermanence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form materialized in concrete and stone as idealization of true forms; represents significance of the physical object</td>
<td>Form materialized in steel, wood, and reinforced concrete as idealization of truth to new building materials and economy of use</td>
<td>Form materialized in modern building materials in excess without pre-designation of true form; represents dissolution of the significance of the physical object</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this document, the term “classical” refers to the formal characteristics from the architecture of the Renaissance as stated above as well as the ideals that these forms convey. Eisenman states that the term classical refers to evoking “a timeless past, a ‘golden age’ superior to the modern time or the present.” Eisenman suggests the ideals of the classical took form in modern architecture through the three fictions in the following ways:

In “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End,” Eisenman states that the first fiction of classical and modern architecture is

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13 Eisenman, “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End,” p. 164. Eisenman states that his proclamation of “the end of the classical” might be more accurately stated as “The End of the Classical as Classic,” arguing “that the dominant conditions of the classical (origin, end, and the process of composition) are under reconsideration.” p. 165.
representation, which was intended to frame meaning. This includes Renaissance representation of already-valued antique buildings, and the simulation of classical elements in post-modern architecture, and the representation of function in modern architecture. The second fiction is reason, which was intended to order truth. This involves the search for origins and predetermined goals. For example, the formation of a set of compositional rules, the creation of type forms, as well as function and technique as concepts derived from rational thinking. And the third fiction is history, which was intended to extricate the idea of the timeless from that of change. This consists of the use of preceding buildings as a source of the timeless, as well as modern architecture’s invocation of the zeitgeist—meaning “spirit of the time”—as eternal thereafter.

After the publication of this essay, Eisenman’s intellectual and design trajectory focused on directly overcoming these three fictions. Eisenman argues that “once the loss of self-evident value allows the timeless to be cut free from the meaningful and the truthful,” then it is no longer necessary to produce “architecture by recourse to the classical values inherent in representation, reason, and history.”\(^{14}\) He proposes and develops a method of textually reading and producing architecture, addressing architecture as a kind of writing, thus eliminating the classical concepts of origin, end, and the arbitrary representations of an idealized past or future.\(^ {15}\) From the above observations on Eisenman’s design trajectories and writings, this thesis proposes that:

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 159.
\(^{15}\) Eisenman’s elimination of the concepts of origin and end come with complication, and are most directly and completely eliminated in his “cities of artificial excavation” series. However, Chapter 3 of this study suggests that the series presents an inadvertent mirroring of the fiction of reason.
Upon a careful study of Eisenman’s “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, The End of the End,” and his earlier writings, an unconscious intellectual paradox emerges in his designs because the more that he attempts—either in writing or in design—to move away from what he saw as the fictions of the classical tradition in modern architecture, the more he confirms the role of the classical traditions in his own contemporary architectural design.

Eisenman entered into the discipline of architecture in the immediate post-World War II era, which in social discourses met with severe criticism about the role of the Modern Movement in architecture. As an individual who studied architecture with certain idealisms of the Modern Movement—change that can bring about social transformation—he expresses this intellectual belief system in his writings. However, since Modern architecture was under severe scrutiny in the decades after World War II, Eisenman’s revolutionary focus on the “three fictions of architecture” since the fifteenth century can be seen as an avoidance of the confrontational social missions of Modern architecture with the conservative traditional society without giving up the revolutionary intentions of the movement.

The thesis also proposes that most of the secondary critical writings on Eisenman’s work focused exclusively on the apparent high-modernist modes of visual representation in his designs without paying closer attention to how he quotes, ruptures, and disguises classical elements in his building designs in his attempt to dissolve them. This is the crux of Eisenman’s work. In other words, it can be
suggested that Eisenman engages in a cathartic process of creation and re-creation of modernist revolutionary tendencies without openly celebrating that ideological trajectory. This is the paradox that gives his work its transformative significance and draws scholars' curiosity.
1.2 Eisenman’s Background in the Architectural Context of the Post-World War II Era

The intellectual climate of the post-war era in which Eisenman was developing his ideas affected his thinking, and subsequently, the writing of the 1984 essay. He was born in 1932 in Newark, New Jersey, and he began to study architecture in the early 1950s at Cornell University. He later studied at Columbia University towards the end of the decade, followed by research at Cambridge University in England, where he studied under the architectural historian Colin Rowe, who encouraged him to reinterpret Le Corbusier’s—one of the leading figures of the Modern Movement—design projects.16 His task under Rowe involved the identification of non-visual compositional coherence aspects in Le Corbusier’s building designs, regardless of whether or not the reasons for the insertion of the forms in the design were understood or not.17 The study was underpinned on the camouflaged aspects of Le Corbusier’s work that advanced high modernism, while certain classical elements and forms were quoted in manners that were not legible to the casual observer.

This exercise set Eisenman on the path of seeking non recognizable elements in building design, for example, composition of columns, axiality, symmetry, etc. This was at a time when the social promises of the Modern Movement in architecture were beginning to be called into question, largely as part of a broader rethinking of the ideals of linear progress, rationalism, truth, and technological advance in social discourses after the effects of World War II. By the end of the 1960s, architects and theorists had begun directly

indicting orthodox modernism in various ways: Robert Venturi sought out to show that modern architecture failed to represent little other than itself, thus failing to accommodate the complexity of imagery in modern everyday life. Aldo Rossi focused on the significance and dissolution of the traditional city, which orthodox modern architecture failed to acknowledge. The critical studies of Venturi and Rossi were in very different ways and from different geographic locations influenced by a rapidly growing consumerism in modern culture. Architectural theorist Diane Ghirardo describes this era as being also characterized by “a rejection of the possibility for unity of form or ideology,” involving caricatures of modern architecture. Here, it can be suggested that Eisenman’s focus on the three fictions was influenced by the fact that “Modernist aesthetics [had by then] drifted from the margins to the mainstream.”

Ghirardo divides US architects in this era into the “Whites” and the “Greys.” She writes, “...the ‘Whites’ included Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier, Michael Graves and Charles Gwathmey, who adhered fairly strictly to the pure, sleek architectural aesthetics of Modernism. The ‘Greys,’ on the other hand, Venturi, Moore and Stern...rejected the white look in favor of historical styles and architectural elements.”

As such, Eisenman’s modeled his early house experiments on his admiration of Le Corbusier’s work which in some cases stems out of his abstraction of classical forms.

In addition to the responses of architects to modern architecture’s changing role, modern architecture was also being reconsidered from a historical perspective. Eisenman was influenced by a variety of scholars including Rowe and the architectural historian

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19 Ibid., p. 28.
Manfredo Tafuri who he did not directly study under, and whose writings were not widely available in English until the 1970s. It can be stated that his earlier writings were influenced by Rowe, while his later writings and design were influenced by Tafuri starting in the 1970s.\(^2\)

While Colin Rowe did not publish the collection of essays *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* until 1976, the essays were already in print in the 1940s and 1950s following World War II. Considering Eisenman’s correspondences with Rowe beginning in the early 1960s, one can argue that he was already aware of the essays before the collection appeared in 1976. In *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, Rowe compares Le Corbusier’s designs to Palladio’s work; he supported his thesis with the observation that Le Corbusier’s Garches and Malcontenta house projects reflected certain universal design values such as symmetry, order, central elements, and proportion. Rowe states:

> Le Corbusier has become the source of innumerable pastiches and of tediously amusing exhibition techniques; but it is the magnificently realized quality of the originals which one rarely finds in the works of neo-Palladians and exponents of ‘le style Corbu’...it should only be sententiously suggested that, in the case of the derivative works, it is perhaps an adherence to ‘rules’ which has lapsed.\(^2\)

Other essays in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, discussed visual reception of architecture, and the relationships between how the design practices in the profession from the fifteenth to the twentieth century shared a set of formal properties

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Rather than “historical process” or “individual personality.” Referring again to the work of Le Corbusier, Rowe states:

An absolute value is consistently imputed to mathematics...and order is established as an intellectual concept affirmative of universal and comforting truths...and it becomes apparent that cubes, spheres, cylinders, cones, and their products are demanded as objects governed by and intensifying sensuous appreciation.

Here, we can see the influences of Rowe on Eisenman in the essay “The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End,” when we observe how Rowe argues that the Modern Movement unknowingly continued an adherence to the classical system in architecture. However, unlike Eisenman, Rowe argues that it was through compositional strategies rather than emphases on function or structure. Rowe also points out that the movement’s emphasis on objectivity, “the conception of such a form, purged of individual sentiment and rising above personal emotion, is, at the bottom, a classical one.”

He ultimately characterizes the “neo-‘Classicism’” of Modern Architecture as a “form of ‘regression’ which the classicizing mutations...infer...[and] derive from the rejection of the notion of an overriding, coercive, and creative zeitgeist.” In sum, Rowe describes the architecture of the Modern Movement as failing to produces anything “new,” but rather engaging in older compositional strategies.

Also responding to the failed social missions of modern architecture—over ten years after Rowe and in a very different and more direct critique—Manfredo Tafuri argues

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23 Ibid., p. 42.
24 Eisenman’s three fictions suggest a continuity with Rowe’s writings on modern architecture in that they suggest that modern architecture never broke from the classical’s beliefs in the true and eternal. However, Eisenman in his work seems to desire less of an abolition of these beliefs, than a reworking of their relevance in contemporary culture.
26 Rowe, “Neo-‘Classicism’ and Modern Architecture II,” ibid., p. 156.
that capitalist development has taken away the “revolutionary” ideological aims from architecture, reducing the formal to “sublime uselessness.”27 While Tafuri’s Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development was not published in English until 1976, the questions he explores—with particular regards to the dissolution of modern architecture’s social missions in the developments of modernity—can be seen as already being a large concern in the context of the prior decade. Tafuri’s use of the term “modern” here is not exclusive to the Modern Movement, but includes architecture from the Enlightenment to the 1960s. He states:

Attacking the subject of architectural ideology from this point of view means trying to explain why the apparently most functional proposals for the reorganization of this sector of capitalist development have had to suffer the most humiliating frustrations.28

Thus Eisenman’s proclamation of the fiction of representation can be linked to Tafuri’s suggestion that modern architecture did little more than represent revolutionary change rather than enact it. Tafuri suggests that the idea of “revolution” has been excluded to the bourgeois intellectual class, and is “damaging from the working-class point of view.”29 In addition, the “ideas of the intellectual avant-garde” rarely converge with the logic of advanced capitalism, and any form of “shock” is neutralized by the experience of modernity.30 He characterizes modern architectural ideology as attempting to reconcile—or more accurately mediate—contradictions of the modern metropolis as a kind of consensus—such as realism and utopia, order and disorder, or rational and irrational—

28 Ibid., p. 2.
29 Ibid., p. x.
30 Ibid., p. 50, 78-89.
ultimately resulting in nothing more than “pure and simple repetition.” Tafuri also argues that the “structural method”—or the linguistic models of architecture—follows the logic of advertising, or without “final models, nullifies the role of the new ideologies,” and thus has no choice but to be integrated in capitalist development or disappear. Overall, Tafuri challenges the idea that architectural ideology can have any political dimension that is not dissolved or rejected by capitalist development.

Both Rowe’s and Tafuri’s analyses suggest the impossibility of an avant-garde social revolution in modern and contemporary architecture, and it cannot be ruled out that the conclusions reached by Rowe and Tafuri might have inspired Eisenman to see modern architectural visual languages as fictitious. Reacting to Tafuri in a later essay, Eisenman writes: “Tafuri is caught up with the separation of the critical, or creative, work from the new in its reaction to time...For me, critical work exists in some form of an internal time...that is embedded within the history of architectural discourse.” He continues:

Neither the autonomy of architecture nor the idea that this autonomy...constitutes a permanent condition of the avant-garde can be merely willed away. To attempt to do this, as both Rowe and Tafuri have done...is to demonstrate the continuing power of such an idea. It remains for us today to continue to explore and expand the possibilities for such an autonomy in the face of the hegemony of world capital.

While Eisenman presented this statement at a later time than when he published the 1984 essay, it can be seen as a continuation of his rethinking of the fiction of history. Anthony

31 Ibid., p. 60.
32 Ibid., p. 163-166. This statement foreshadows one of the cruxes of Eisenman’s work—that the absence of models resulting from the negation of the fiction of reason can nullify itself quickly.
34 Ibid., p. 78.
Vidler’s observations on how Rowe’s and Tafuri’s ideas influenced the resistance of closure to historical quotations in architectural design offers insight into how Eisenman’s work can be seen as somewhat continuous with classical and modern architecture. In addition, architectural theorist K. Michael Hays’s description of Eisenman’s work as the late avant-garde—contradictorily incorporating Rowe’s and Tafuri’s “limiting conditions”—suggests that we might see Eisenman’s focus on the three fictions as much more complex than a mere proclamation of their end.
1.3 Theoretical Background and Literature Review

In *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, Anthony Vidler suggests that historians of modern architecture in the post-war period—including Rowe and Tafuri—colluded history and design, ultimately giving way to projects such as Eisenman’s. Vidler suggests that this argument poses a challenge to the “end of history” proclamation, and rather suggests that the reinterpretations or constructions of architectural history can be a way to confront immediate political situations or contemporary contexts in architectural design. Vidler states:

In the search for a unified vision of modernity following the heterogeneous experiments of the avant-gardes in the first quarter of the twentieth century, historians played a decisive role, defining early twentieth-century programs, forms, and styles in such a way as to imply possible continuities with the present.35

To Vidler, this does not suggest a rigid break with earlier forms of modernism nor a retreat to prior modes of abstraction, but rather a way to continue the project of modernism without losing sight of past architectural principles. Vidler argues: “Once relegated to the status of ‘history,’ modern architecture itself was susceptible to academicization, even to revival.”36 He continues to argue that some historical narratives “shared a common concept of history as a determining, unfolding force, capable of articulating questions of the past, present and future of architecture, as well as a belief in some form of cultural zeitgeist that, if correctly identified, equally determines the respective ‘modernity’ or nonmodernity of the work.”37

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36 Ibid., p. 5.
37 Ibid., p. 6.
One result is that instead of leading to any “modernity,” they would often be cast off as styles attempting merely to justify present architectural practices—inevitably as “the historicization of modernism.”38 Or in other situations (such as Rowe’s received influence on the shift to postmodernism), a more instrumental use of history would lead to architectural history as a kind of “source, verification, and authorization” used for the proselytization of movements in design.39 To Vidler, Tafuri’s “ceaseless search for methods of analysis” influenced a “theory effect” among designers who were “apparently shielded from the pitfalls of eclecticism by ‘scientific’ authority.”40 He argues against the received views of histories offering any type of closure, and he states that in each situation, a “contemporary ‘modern’” was invented for architectural design, that was continuous with the past and enabled by modernism itself. This is ultimately used to challenge the common reception of modernism as breaking with history, and postmodernism as returning to a humanistic acceptance of history. Rather, Vidler argues that “the modernist avant-gardes in fact understood history as a fundamental force, an engine of the social world,” and postmodernism’s “willingness to ransack history...for its vocabulary revealed it indeed as fundamentally disrespectful of history, and even more disrespectful of the present.”41 In the end, Vidler’s main argument is that the construction of post-war architectural histories should be seen as refusing “closure and neofinalism.” In the end such refusals he writes:

Should influence one to look for places where uncomfortable questions of form and program with respect to society and its political formation were asked; where irresolution rather than resolution was assumed; where projects were started but left unfinished, not as failures but as active and unresolved challenges; where disruptions from outside the field inconveniently questioned the verities of

38 Ibid., p. 7.
39 Ibid., p. 13.
41 Ibid., p. 192-193.
established practices; where the very forms in which we conceive of history itself have been put into question.\textsuperscript{42}

In Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde (2010), Hays—who is largely responding to a renewed interest in realism in architectural culture—describes the late architectural avant-garde, between the years of 1966 and 1983 (including Eisenman’s work in this period), as responding to and challenging the conditions of architecture described in Rowe’s and Tafuri’s writings. Hays positions the late avant-garde as responding to a continuing eclipse of the object by image in cultural production, forcing architecture into autonomy “by the very system it seeks to represent.”\textsuperscript{43} Yet at the same time, Hays posits that this “architectural impulse is part of daily social life and its wide ranging practices,” as an “imaginary ‘solution’ to a real social situation and contradiction.”\textsuperscript{44} Thus, the work of the late avant-garde is seen as a response to the necessity of being part of the very system it stands against, which through “rigorous formal analysis, [makes] the material of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 199.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 1. While the problem of modern architecture’s detachment from everyday social life has been critiqued throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, Hays’s description of the work of the late avant-garde seems most in line with Michel de Certeau’s study of everyday life as active relations between manipulative production and consumption. Describing his project, de Certeau states: “If it is true that the grid of ‘discipline’ is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also ‘miniscule’ and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what ‘ways of operating’ form the counterpart, on the consumer’s (or ‘dominee’s’) side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order.” In this sense, Hays might here be seen as interested in the acts of manipulation to the object of modern architecture in the 1970s, in de Certeau’s words “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus [lending] a political dimension to everyday practices,” detaching and working within the constraints of a containing order. Michel de Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life,” Ubuweb, http://www.ubu.com/papers/de_certeau.html.
\end{itemize}
architecture stand against consumerism.”45 In a sense, it is a “desire” to come to terms with “architecture’s original object forever lost (the Tabernacle in the desert, the Vitruvian tree house, the primitive hut).”46

Hays’s stance on Tafuri ideas is pessimistic. In his view, reading Tafuri reveals that “by the 1970s, what remains of modernity is...an architectural past that cannot be recovered and a future that will not arrive.”47 In addition, Tafuri’s ideas imply that architecture inevitably must reproduce the structure of capitalist society or be withdrawn from its service. Moreover, Hays suggests that Rowe identified the historical avant-garde’s failure to fuse art and life. Hays states: “That the fusion ultimately failed may be attributed to a shift...in postwar architecture...from modernity fully developed as the essential desired goal of architecture to modernity as architecture’s limiting condition.”48 The result is that from this approach, architecture is reduced to “form as its own language” detached from any social visions.49 Typically, the received characterizations of architecture by Tafuri and Rowe lead to the characterization of any architectural attempts of social transformation after the historical avant-garde as neo-avant-garde—negating the “avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life,”—and thus risking farce.50

However, while Hays presents this characterization as suggesting architecture’s limiting condition, he also argues that the late avant-garde “are explicitly and especially

46 Ibid., p. 16. Hays is not particularly clear here what is meant by “Vitruvian tree house.” However, it is clear that through these terms, he is referring to architecture’s traditional rationalized object.
47 Ibid., p. 3.
48 Ibid., p. 5.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p. 4. The term “neo-avant-garde” comes from Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. However, it is used here in relation to descriptions of architecture by Rowe and Tafuri.
sensitive to the effects of reification...not just a victim of its effects; they critically inscribe these effects.”  

To Hays, the common received views of Rowe and Tafuri do “not sufficiently recognize...that this architecture...has already incorporated the annulment of its own necessity...[and] is a reflection on the foundations and limits of architecture itself.”  

Thus, the negativity of the late avant-garde does not suggest an end condition, but rather a use of the loss of the architectural object in a way “necessary to imagine a necessary lack in the real itself.”  

On the one hand, Hays to an extent is agreeing with the common interpretation of Rowe and Tafuri—that by the 1970s, architecture's aspirations as cultural representation were challenged by commercialization and mediation. On the other hand, Hays argues that the architecture of the 1970s turned away from striving to resist “the very situation that brought it into being” to an “architecture reflecting on Architecture.”  

Hays continues: “The object-in-itself becomes an object-different-from-itself...a medium for a Real that it does not simply reproduce, but necessarily both reveals and conceals, manifests and represses.”  

The result, to Hays, is that this launches an

51 Ibid., p. 7.  
52 Ibid., p. 11.  
53 Ibid. The term “real” here refers to architecture's larger cultural position in the construction of subject positions.  
54 Ibid., p. 13.  
inquiry into “architecture’s possibilities rather than its actualities,” questioning “how architecture exceeds itself…the other side of imagining architecture’s end.” In other words, this architecture probes the question: how can architecture exist when its existence is so heavily threatened by the larger forces of history? In Hays’s terms, it is “divided from itself by memories of a past…and anticipations of a future continuing identity.”

Inevitably, this work being integral to the system it opposes would find itself diminished in that very system. Hays states: “The architecture of the late avant-garde performs the impossibility of architecture’s full realization; it stages an architectural project that for historical reasons must be undertaken but is ultimately brought to failure by a dynamic integral to the project itself.” Hays describes this as being an “imperative to make do with just what is already at hand, with what is already available…precisely what forecloses desire…traversing the limits of architectural signification; it is architecture’s death drive.” This is not to suggest that the late avant-garde confirms the end of architecture, but rather that it “enacts architecture’s inadequation to itself…[and] leaves the need for something else unassuaged.”

Both Hays’s and Vidler’s arguments raise a number of questions about Eisenman’s work. How is the “autonomy” Eisenman proposes to resist “the hegemony of world capital”? If as Hays suggests, Eisenman repeats the conditions he aims to transcend—or

56 Ibid., p. 13, 17.
57 Ibid., p. 19.
58 Ibid., p. 21.
59 Ibid., p. 169. The term “death drive” comes from Freud’s psychoanalysis, who “observed the syndrome both in the child’s tendency to repeat, as in the game Fort-Da, anything found to be effective in diminishing his displeasure during the absence of his mother, and in certain neurotic fixations on traumatic events and the paradoxical regression to unpleasure through the repetition of those events.” See also ibid., p. 78-84.
60 Ibid.
critically inscribes the effects of architecture’s condition in hopes of escaping it—why can his work be received so easily as tautological—as being needlessly repeated? And what “unassuaged” possibilities have emerged in his work after 1983? If one is to accept Vidler’s argument that postmodernism’s application of forms and styles from history leads to an end condition, then how does Eisenman’s use of these elements in his designs differ? And how does his use of these elements aim to transcend the condition of architecture that Hays describes? In addition, how does Eisenman in his discourse endeavor to escape the fictional closure that he attributes to architecture since the fifteenth century?

It is most likely that out of all the works (written or designed) by Peter Eisenman, the project for the Aronoff Center at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio is the most researched and documented in the book titled Eleven Authors in Search of a Building (1996). In the book, K. Michael Hays describes the building as an undetermined space derived from experimentation outside of logical frameworks. Hays’s short essay in the book can be seen as a precursor to his theory of the late avant-garde—although in the latter he further departs from the significance he attributes to the built architectural object and further complicates the idea of self-criticism—in its focus on how the work exceeds disciplinary constraints (without resorting to an exaggerated negation of ideology). In this essay titled “Theory After Building,” Hays describes Eisenman’s work as involving “the application of certain devices of modernism to critical representations,” discovering the “new in the given.” 61 This is about a search for objective architectural knowledge. Hays points out that he visited the structure with Tafuri’s and Rowe’s criticisms in mind, and expected the building to be a materialization of Eisenman’s theoretical concepts as it can be

61Ibid., p. 22-23.
viewed as a transitional piece in Eisenman’s career, introducing computer-generated form that further distances authorial intention after the “cities of artificial excavation” projects. Like Davidson, Hays argues that the building exceeds this type of analysis through the allowance of chance in individual experience. He also points to a number of attributes: the building has no outside as suggested by photographs of models, the perception of the space is layered, and the “surplus of space” is overwhelming. The main point is that the complexity of the building exceeds any typical forms of theorization.

In a forward to the book, Joseph A. Steger, president of the University of Cincinnati at the time, introduces the building as a “signature of excellence that confirms the rebirth of the physical environment at the University of Cincinnati.” Steger introduces the university master plan along with the university’s objectives to enhance the physical surroundings, creating links both within and outside of the campus, and while promoting diversity. He also explains the university’s status as relatively high among the global span of institutions, and places the Aronoff Center as part of its achievement as it “inspires and challenges us to greatness in our endless quest to expand and harness the intellect.”

In another forward, then Dean of the College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning, Jay Chatterjee, introduces the building as an engaging and inspiring environment at first impression. Like Steger, Chatterjee describes the act of constructing an ambitious space as part of the university’s achievements, with specificity to the college itself. He suggests that the building contributes to the expansion of the possibilities of the discipline of architecture in theory and in practice. To Chatterjee, it challenges the

63 Ibid., p. 9.
conventional corridor-lined interior while being sensitive to its site, as well as performing well mechanically.

Cynthia Davidson in the introduction to the book argues that the first hand experiential qualities of the building exceeds representations. She suggests that the excessive mediated exposure of the building in the early 1990s before its completion allowed individuals to have preconceptions about it before its completion. However, to Davidson, these representations do not accurately describe it, as it challenges “traditional conceptions of plan and section.” For example, the plan represents a “promenade architecturale”—or a given route—that is complicated by the “dense” wireframe drawings of the project as well as the varying unexpected views of “subjects.” She also points out that the complex conception drawing could have only been drawn using a computer program. Referring to the authors of the book’s experiences, she writes that the building “challenges the conventions of architectural theory, typology, history, program, [and] production,” forcing the authors to refuse preconceived “categories of knowledge.”

At the pedestrian level, the completed structure does not quite convey the power conveyed by the drawings or bird’s-eye views of it. The individual is left to rather construct the fragmented object in experience by walking around and through it. She describes several attributes to the progression through the building, such as a lack of: sequence and continuity, clarity of direction, clear presence of elements, and unobstructed views. She states: “In the Renaissance, the ideal object mirrored the ideal subject. In modern architecture, the subject reconstitutes the object. In the Aronoff Center...the object

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64 Ibid., p. 12.
65 Ibid., p. 13.
defines the subject by fracturing the subject as both seen and seeing.” Overall, Davidson argues that the building is about the “repositioning of the subject.”

Alejandro Zaera-Polo in his essay titled “The Making of the Machine: Powerless Control as a Critical Strategy” addresses the project’s relation to power structures. He suggests that this project is an example of confronting the dilemma of architecture and mediation and the marketplace. To Zaera-Polo, Eisenman confronts this without rejecting the zeitgeist as an “operative condition,” yet disregarding relations to power. His main point is that Eisenman here replaces the subject—a form of power to Zaera-Polo—with an instrumental process free from origins and authority. Thus, it operates within the very structures it aims to challenge with a “critical force.” However, Zaera-Polo argues that it embraces “emerging forms of production or economic integration” in the process of its design and construction. He points out that Eisenman here breaks from his prior projects by generating the design out of “traces” of the site and program rather than constraints produced outside of the project itself. He makes brief mention as well to “the exploration of categories specific to the most traditional definition of the discipline.” Zaera-Polo describes this process as involving: the selection of site characteristics, the transformation of those characteristics to create the forms of the building, and the subjection of those forms to displacements. The resulting process is “accidental” rather than entirely linear. To Zaera-Polo, one of the problems encountered in the design process is the need to use conventional building materials, which Eisenman manages to use in unconventional ways. He extends his critique to the application of material and functional elements as well, questioning whether the search for architectural knowledge needs to be so entirely

66 Ibid., p. 17.
67 Ibid., p. 31.
detached from the production of space. In addition, Zaera-Polo presents a tension produced between Eisenman’s larger theoretical objectives and the specific practical and experiential objectives in this project.

In “Connecting the Dots: The Dimensions of a Wireframe,” Donna Barry, who worked as a project architect in the construction, explains the design process in detail. She suggests that the project uses conventional rules of design and construction that appear to contradict conventions. Barry explains that the process implemented derives from “symmetry breaking”—the use of simple mathematical laws to achieve complexity—and the translation of this method into construction techniques. The result is a self-similar form of repetition that produces asymmetry, intended to “redefine the human experience in space.” She describes the design process as beginning with a volumetric box derived from programmatic requirements, repeated and overlapped in plan and section according to logarithmic variances, producing a condition where the same overlap never repeats itself. This process avoids the complete willful random form making of expressionism. This follows a curved form produced by the contours of the site, then is torqued, stepped, and shifted to obtain a higher level of complexity. On top of this, a chevron shape is formed from an extension of the shape of the corridor of one of the existing buildings, and then repeated, shifted, and rotated in plan to align with the other two existing buildings. This is intended to blur the distinction between the existing buildings and the new construction. Columns follow these shapes, some structural and some not. Barry argues that the significance of this method is that it could not be conceived of a priori, any scales refer to the design system rather than the human body, and the building’s logic is not easily read by

68 Ibid., p. 49.
the occupant. The result is a space that gives no relation between the body and the surrounding forms, but rather produces a “discovered path.”

Henry Cobb in “A Note on the Criminology of Ornament: From Sullivan to Eisenman” explains the design as inventing a “new system of architectural ornament.” Comparing Eisenman’s design to Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright’s uses of ornament, Cobb argues that Eisenman has produced “the elimination of background,” meaning the decorative ornament—in this case, the shapes derived from hanging gypsum board in unusual ways—is more intense than the whole composition. In other words, Eisenman has transformed a typically “neutral, banal, [and] inexpressive” material into an expressive form. Cobb suggests that this contributes to Eisenman’s “figure/figure” principle. He states: “in pursuing this program Peter Eisenman has coincidentally reinvigorated the oldest, most primitive…and most innately habitual of human arts: the art of ornament.”

Sarah Whiting describes the building as challenging any form of monument to architecture in her essay titled “Building Inside Out: Perspectives on the Conspicuously Inconspicuous.” Whiting asks: “How can an addition that doubles the size of an institutional building, and that is also symbolic of the discipline of architecture, not become a monument of some sort?” Whiting suggests that the building design’s avoidance of perspective negates monumentality, subjective narration, and support of political ideology. She states that in this project, Eisenman’s method derives from his use of axonometric drawing in his early house projects, and lessons learned from those experiments “infiltrates” the perspective drawings of the Aronoff Center. One example of non-

69 Ibid., p. 95.
70 Ibid., p. 97.
71 Ibid., p. 101.
monumentality in the building is the blurring of site and building, encouraging “de-noticing.” Whiting states that “Unlike conventional institutional buildings whose sites serve as plinths...here it is difficult to discern whether the building is emerging from its landscape or whether the landscape is engulfing the building.”\textsuperscript{72} In addition, the entire building cannot be apprehended by one single view, but demands to be read from the inside. Like the other authors, Whiting also suggests that the multiplicity of views opposes the linear, open viewpoint of monuments. She argues that “this project constructs multiple centers which, when seen from multiple vantage points, create multiple repercussions in the form of a built critique.”\textsuperscript{73} Overall, to Whiting, the project “axonometricizes” perspective in this way, rather than replacing it, avoiding the endorsement of ideologies through the act of prescription. In addition, Whiting proposes a significant paradox, particularly that the building is required to endure, diminishing the effectiveness of its impression.

Kurt Forster, in “Rising From the Land, Sinking into the Ground,” describes the Aronoff Center in relation to Eisenman’s larger oeuvre of work. He argues that the project differs from Eisenman’s others in that its “most striking features all derive from conceptions of motion and inertia” experienced onsite.\textsuperscript{74} He also argues that Eisenman’s ideas “locate themselves in, as well as stand against, the physical structure,” and thus depend on a strong link between ideas and executions.\textsuperscript{75} Forster suggests that the introduction of the curve in this project introduces the concept of motion, with analogy to a desire for an architectural design that can be related to life forms. Comparing Eisenman’s

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 103.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 106.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 114.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 115.
work to Frank Gehry’s, Forster considers both architects to “allow ideas and intuitions to take physical shape in ways that have not been accepted in architecture.”\(^{76}\) This is particularly the replacement of form by “force,” characterized by fluidity and permitted by the “classicizing stability lurking in the matrix of modern architecture.”\(^{77}\) This is not to be confused with expressionism but rather “lies in the mental pictures of modern science.” Overall, this inclusion of “motion” foreshadows “darker regions of the imagination” in the experience of the structure.

In the essay titled “Fringe Benefits,” Silvia Kolbowski writes about the lack of legibility in the building. She describes the building as “leaning,” a conventional attribute to buildings: leaning in its physical form, leaning upon the models used for its design, and leaning as the new on the old. Kolbowski also addresses the indeterminacy of reference to the design process as viewed by the spectator. This redefines “contextualism,” a process derived from the site that is “neither historicist nor typically modernist.”\(^{78}\) She points out that this project departs from modernism in its refusal to erase the “iconographic traces of the precedent.”\(^{79}\) She also points out that there is no hierarchy of spaces in the building, and thus no conventional institutionalized privileging of the subject. Kolbowski describes Eisenman’s model-based methodology as “overdetermination,” which can “serve to point to the social determination of all architectural methodologies,” although perhaps not as conventionalized.\(^{80}\) She also argues that this methodological approach to nonfunctional form making “leans” on functional requirements. In this approach, the will of social

\(^{76}\) Ibid., p. 117.  
\(^{77}\) Ibid., p. 118.  
\(^{78}\) Ibid., p. 135.  
\(^{79}\) Ibid., p. 136.  
\(^{80}\) Ibid., p. 137.
intentions presents itself in the process of challenging programmatic conventions after the model has produced a form. Therefore, it engages a kind of dialogue between opposites that avoids mere decoration and utilitarian program. Kolbowski argues that the architecture is both “spectacular” and also “reflects its own status.”

In his essay, Sanford Kwinter’s asks: “Can One Go Beyond Piranesi? (Linear Notes for a Building Revisited).” In ten long, numbered paragraphs, Kwinter brings up a number of observations about the building, often suggesting analogies to music. Kwinter begins with his trip to the building, a car ride with a number of other theorists: Alan Balfour, Jeff Kipnis, Alejandro Zaera-Polo, Greg Lynn, and Ben van Berkel. He describes their role as polyphonic, or “multiple voices in linked unfolding.” After making several analogies to his travel and to music—for example, the struggle to fight for ideas, novelty as taking place between ideas and realization—Kwinter suggests that appreciation of the building comes not from a matter of taste, but from an understanding of the courage “to create the possibility of architecture both for ourselves and for everyone else.” He argues that the building exemplifies a shift in practice that is not about “just a novel set of shapes and forms, but a new type of rationality and a new intuition of space as an active medium, shaped not by tools but by adjacent, embedded, and remote events and the routines and logics they trigger.” Kwinter continues by describing Eisenman’s work as seeking “Piranesian effects” characterized by unforeseen complexity. Like the other authors, he points out that the regulatory method used to design the building leads to indeterminate results. He raises a significant point as well, distancing the building from “post-”

81 Ibid., p. 141.
82 Ibid., p. 155.
83 Ibid., p. 157.
tendencies: “What we seek is not different from what most of genuine modern radical thought and practice has sought: to force every apparent natural unity to yield and to express the coursing multiplicities of which it is made.”84 In the end, he argues that the building presents possibilities for a transition from a prior model-based method to a kind of freedom or “improvisation” in the future of design.

Jeffrey Kipnis approaches the building from its position in Eisenman’s career in the essay titled “P-Tr’s Progress.” Kipnis describes Eisenman as always pushing architecture as form, often influencing a reactionary response. He suggests that Eisenman expands Colin Rowe’s argument that formal properties constitute architecture to “produce architectural effects never before imagined” that “is not seen but read” and “belongs not to the senses, but to the mind.”85 The result is the possibility for architecture to engage itself as critical cultural commentary. Kipnis places the building as one of Eisenman’s projects in which the forms go “beyond the point of legibility.”86 And like the rest of the authors, he points out that knowledge of the design process will not “account for the building’s visceral impact,” one that is rather discomforting. Kipnis suggests that this results in “new sensibilities” derived from the emotive qualities of the built work, although perhaps lacking in materiality. For example, the exterior colors of the building do not contribute enough to the building’s “disturbing effect” due to the exterior material application. He characterizes the building as “an architecture of radical singularity” in that it does not “follow any other building as a prototype” or provide a new prototype.87 Kipnis suggests that this may result

84 Ibid., p. 162.
85 Ibid., p. 172.
86 Ibid., p. 173.
87 Ibid., p. 180.
in two possibilities: it may either challenge the use of prototypes in architecture or it will be ignored because of its abandonment of prototypes.

While several of these authors got carried away by the visual effects of the building, none of them understood that it is a classical building. Davidson writes about the expectation of a “promenade architecturale,” Hays points out the “application of certain devices of modernism,” Zaera-Polo the use of conventional construction techniques. Barry as well explains the need for a rational design method, Cobb the use of historical forms of ornament, and Whiting the use of the typically monumental. Forster addresses the immenseness of elements and the modernist ideal of capturing a sense of motion, and Kolbowski argues for the use of conventionalism. In addition, several authors address relations to natural forms as well as the blurring between the new and the old. Perhaps Kwinter and Kipnis come closest to this argument, the former pushing the building as not “new” and the latter pushing the building as not prototypical. But they all overlooked the sources of the attributes of the building they were describing that are not necessarily modern or conventional but derived from the “fictional” constructions of the classical tradition as Eisenman has stated eloquently.
1.4 Scope of the Research and the Organization of the Work

While the introduction lays the theoretical foundation of this thesis, the first chapter consists of an analysis of the formal characteristics of Eisenman’s early house projects (1967-1975), the “cities of artificial excavation” projects (1978-1988), and the Aronoff Center for Design and Art (1988-1996) to determine the forms and styles that conform and do not conform to classical modes of representation, or classical “type forms”—for example, “characterized by symmetries, central axes, and a hierarchy of elemental parts.”\(^8\)

Firstly, the chapter explains Eisenman’s stated objectives in the house projects along with an analysis of the design processes and how he uses classical elements in House I, II, III, IV, and VI (1967-1975) in order to introduce a method intended to challenge classical architecture’s reliance on representation. Secondly, the chapter examines the “cities of artificial excavation” projects to determine how the processes of design and type forms have changed from the house projects. Thirdly, the uses of classical type forms in the Aronoff Center are identified. And lastly, this chapter asks the question: what has changed in the use of classical elements in the progression of Eisenman’s projects?

The second chapter focuses on a change in Eisenman’s theoretical discourse in the 1980s to question what influenced this change, and how this change has moved away from the institutionalization of precepts similar to the classical tradition. Firstly, Eisenman’s retrospective reconsideration of projects in the 1980s is addressed. While Eisenman has published a large amount of writings on these projects—several of which are referenced in this study—the essay titled “Misreading Peter Eisenman” (1987), serves as the focus of his

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reconsideration of the house projects, as it is the most clearly and directly articulated essay with reference to House I, II, III, IV, and VI. Secondly, this chapter asks: why has K. Michael Hays described Eisenman’s use of repetition in his Cannaregio project as aiming to transcend the conditions he wishes to overcome, and what effect does this have in Eisenman’s later continuation of the method produced in this project? Lastly, Eisenman's response to his house projects and method developed in the “cities of artificial excavation” projects is called into question considering the French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s involvement with Eisenman’s work in the late 1980s. While Derrida has published an immense amount of writing (some of which had a direct influence on Eisenman), his writings about Eisenman’s work are of most interest here as they apply succinctly to architecture as opposed to other disciplines. As such, the chapter also focuses on two seemingly contradictory writings by Derrida: “Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books” (1988), and “Letter to Peter Eisenman,” (1990). It is important to underscore that this chapter will not examine other influences from outside the discipline of architecture on Eisenman’s work at this time—such as the writings of linguist Noam Chomsky, art critic Rosalind Krauss, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, etc. It is observed here that his oeuvre during this time period can be considered Derridean in its objectives (particularly the attempt to dismantle the classical foundations of modern architecture without eclipsing their significance). It is also argued that the two texts by Derrida present a challenge to the endeavor of developing a method that replaces the classical tradition.

The third chapter of this study focuses on further development of Eisenman’s theoretical trajectory through consideration of selected writings and architectural projects from 1990 to the present. It also considers the reception of his work in the public realm.
While Eisenman has worked on a large number of projects during this time period, the chapter addresses Eisenman’s competition entry for the Rebstockpark Master Plan in Frankfurt Germany (1990-1992), and on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany (1997-2005). Both projects have been published and criticized by the architect himself and others in various forums. Firstly, the chapter briefly addresses Eisenman’s work in relation to the broader architectural climate of the 1990s, and some of the concerns that were arising in the discipline and practice. Secondly, the chapter explains the Rebstockpark Master Plan project to suggest its direct critique of classical distinctions such as building types and figure-ground in an effort to expose new relations. Thirdly, it briefly covers the history of the proposition of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe from its initial conceptual proposal in 1988 to 1997 when the forms developed and defined. Eisenman’s design is explained through its forms and the architect’s own explanation of the project. Lastly, selected criticisms of the project are addressed to further understand the varying interpretations of the design. It is argued that the ambiguities resulting from the design challenge critics’ tendencies to interpret the design according to traditional models of categorization, and thus emphasize the classical “fictions”.
2. The Fiction of Representation

The Forms and Styles in
Houses I-VI,
the Cities of Artificial Excavation,
and the Aronoff Center for Design and Art
2.1 Houses I-VI, 1967-1975

Eisenman's design trajectory begins with investigating an understanding of the formal language of architecture. In his earliest published essay, he states: “It will be my contention that formal considerations are basic to all architecture...[and] can help us to develop an agreed language both for criticism and for design.”\(^8^9\) He argues that architectural form is not necessarily merely visual, but can embody a conceptual element that is both intellectually and visually comprehensible. This argument forms the basis of Eisenman’s design work as well as his criticisms of modern and postmodern architectural thinking and practices.

In the house projects, begun in 1967, Eisenman explores the limits set by his interpretations of the self-reflexive nature of the architectural object. In House I (1967-1968), one can see a direct relation between his interpretation of the column-as-sign and the design of the structure. While in Renaissance architecture, the column represented an ideal of universal divine perfection and beauty believed to be found in man, here it merely signifies the process of its own making in order to encourage the spectator’s understanding of its specific form. The house is approached as a diagram through a process-based method in which a cube is divided into spaces marked by columns and beams, independent of any functional requirements. This process is described as an attempt to "produce a set of formal relationships that is the result of the inherent logic in the forms themselves," and opposes experience in favor of understanding.\(^9^0\) The house is designed independent of its


\(^{9^0}\) Peter Eisenman, "House I" in *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman Complete Works*, New York: Rizzoli, 2006, p. 32.
site, programmatic requirements, structural requirements, and material properties—a method that continues to be developed throughout the house projects.

The design of the House I involved two square volumes shifted along a diagonal, then divided into bays similar to the classical ABABA system (see Figure 10 for an example of classical division of bays). However, one bay is removed to form an ABAA composition of bays (or $A_1B_1A_1A_1$) thereby offsetting any kind of symmetry or centrality (Figure 1). The ABAA composition is then further divided to form a symmetrical ABCBA (or $A_2B_1A_1B_2A_2$) spacing of bays within it, yet is shifted to one side of the ABAA spacing throwing off one’s immediate reception of symmetry in the house (Figure 2). In classical architecture, the elevations and plans of bays and their parts were derived from similar mathematical formulas (which are maintained here), although they gained their significance in the belief that they were divinely ordained and thus reflected idealized proportions of the body (Figures 5 and 6). The most common example of these geometric ratios is the golden section, defined in the fifteenth century as the divine proportion, which derives from the relation of the square and the circle, and it can be found in architectural designs from antiquity. In modern architecture, the spacing of bays follow a structural logic or expression and asymmetry was to follow a programmatic logic (Figure 7). In this design, they follow an independent formal logic (as opposed to a truth to divine proportion or materials) intended to encourage reading of the design process. The set of compositional rules used here is more accurately based on a classical set of rules. However, since the classical rules were camouflaged in the design, followed by the detachment of the form from its intended function, the classical object became ambiguous due to the overlapping of the volumes and the bays.

The bays within the house are defined by walls, columns, and beams, and expressed on the exterior with a juxtaposition of white-painted solid walls and black-framed glazing. While the walls generally serve structural and programmatic functions, the exposed columns and beams do not, but rather merely serve as “marking” devices (Figures 3 and 4).\textsuperscript{91} In other words, their function of “holding up” is made ambiguous in order to encourage the viewer to concentrate on reading the design process. For example, columns on the exterior are rectangular (rather than square or circular) and terminate in the air rather than at beams where one expects them to bear weight (Figure 8). Beams extend at points that are not at floor level, hit the columns off center, and a few are even turned sideways so that their width is longer than their depth and the effect of that distortion is the impression on the viewers mind that the beam could not be carrying any weight (Figure 9). This allusion and illusion


about the potential roles of the beam and the column can be seen as an attempt to rethink Modernism’s emphasis on the expression of structural function, which Eisenman links to the classical tradition, and it dates back to Vitruvius’s treatise on architecture. As architectural theorist John Shannon Hendrix points out, this removal of structural function from typically structural forms is “not a new device” but was used in several Renaissance churches.⁹² Eisenman also suggests that “in the past, even when limited by the constraints posed by available materials, architects sought to use structural elements in ways other than those dictated by purely formal requirements.”⁹³ He continues that “the column became a primary structural element and, along with the non-load-bearing wall, a potentially innovative formal device.”⁹⁴ Hendrix compares this to Leon Battista Alberti’s use of non-structural pilasters as a “decorative device in correspondence with the orders of classical architecture” in the fifteenth century, as well as Francesco Borromini’s use of non-structural pilasters to demonstrate “that the material world is a false veil or scaffold which hides the true reality of forms known only to the intelligence” in the seventeenth century (Figures 10-11).⁹⁵ Thus, in its emphasis on the construction of rules relating to design process, composition, and form, Eisenman’s design for House I can be seen as an endeavor to reinterpret the compositional rules of classical architecture in order to respond to the dissolution of the classical, visual object in contemporary culture. In a way, the endeavor

⁹⁴ Ibid.
attempts to replace the prior expression of humanism in design with a process-oriented reading of space.

House II (1969-1970) incorporates a similar, although more complex design process than House I. The design consists of two cube volumes slightly offset, and each divided into three equal and symmetrical bays, oriented perpendicularly in each volume. The slight offset of the two volumes obscures the clarity of symmetry in the visual reception of the house. For example, the columns follow an even spacing in both the x and y axes, but the walls shift and extend to oscillate between the two volumes (Figure 12). As a result, Eisenman suggests that the AAA notation of bays can be read as an ABC notation of bays (or a variety of other notations) due to the variations of the wall positions within the two

volumes that interrupt the reader’s immediate experience of the central, symmetrical axis used in the design. Eisenman refers to this relation of elements as “bi-valency,” or a “relationship between elements rather than in the element itself.”96 In other words, the positioning and forms of the columns and walls here form an ambiguous reading. Another method of encouraging reading here is the perpendicular relation of volumes within the house that directs movement in contrast to the orientations of space. For example, the bays follow different orientations on each level of the house. In addition, the traditional conception of façade or building envelope here is challenged, as the exterior is a result of the compositional logic produced in the process, and “marks” the interior construction of volumes. Eisenman’s goal here is to form a structure that was to be understood by the relationship of the elements within it. He states:

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. The focus is thus transferred from the physical object itself to the understanding of its relationship to an underlying structure.97

Thus, once again, this is an attempt to move from the visually received architectural object.

Eisenman states that “although the Renaissance and the Modern Movement were concerned with the implied aspects of architectural space, they were often so for purely aesthetic or polemical reasons rather than to investigate inherent formal principles,” an

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97 Ibid., p. 36.
argument that will later be called into question regarding the polemical (and even aesthetic) results of Eisenman’s theoretical trajectory.98

It is interesting to note as well that while in House I, the circular columns can be seen to reference an interpretation of both a classical and Modern use of the column as a “marking device,” in House II, the columns serve a structural function (although it still remains slightly ambiguous due to the possibility of walls being structural) but are shaped according to the overlapping of the two volumes. On the interior, they follow a consistent asymmetrical form (Figure 12). While this form can be said to blur the distinction between column and wall, it can also be interpreted as a strange form of elongated base (here extending to the upper floor) and column (extending to the roof). In addition, the columns for the most part remain separated from the wall, perhaps to avoid a decorative use of pilasters, but also to reverse the column’s role of defining space to a function of interrupting space, a device that will continue to be used throughout Eisenman’s later work.

Eisenman also develops his notion of "cardboard architecture" that is present in House I in House II. He states, "The house looks like and is

98 Ibid., p. 39.
constructed like a model...Viewed without the external, scale-specific referent, House II becomes an ambiguous object that could be a building or a model" (Figure 13).  This is an attempt to free the house from any "existing social meanings" to focus on an internal experimentation of form that is hoped to express some kind of subjective meaning. This can be seen to suggest a decreasing relevance in the built architectural object. Similar to Sol LeWitt's work, this is an attempt to blur the distinction between process and product. However, unlike LeWitt's work, Eisenman's diagrams are presented in a linear order beginning with a cube that is gradually altered to form the project. This introduces the concept of the indexical sign, in this case referring to the process of alterations to the cube, which is argued to be free from the personal expression of the designer (or to at least avoid the pitfalls of expressionism). In the end, Eisenman's methods of design implemented here can be seen as a search for compositional devices that retain the logic of classical architecture, while dismissing the stress on the visual, scaled, and constructed architectural object. Interestingly, Eisenman implies that House II might be ideologically neutral, stating: “Such a logical structure of space aims not to comment on the country house as a cultural symbol but to be neutral with respect to its existing social meanings.” However this position has several contradictions.

House III (1969-1971) incorporates a doubling of volumes introduced in House I, and furthered in House II. While the doubling of the volume is perhaps made more subtle here, a third rectangular volume here is introduced, and centrally rotated forty-five degrees along the x-y axis (Figures 14 and 15). Two conditions result from this: First, the frontality or hierarchy of facades is multiplied and made ambiguous as there are now ten rather than four views of the exterior of the house that follow an arbitrary hierarchy in terms of front, side, oblique, etc. This strategy caused the conflation of centrality in plan and frontality in elevation.

Examples of these strategies can be identified in Renaissance architecture, for example, Filippo Brunelleschi’s Pazzi Chapel and S. Maria degli Angeli in Florence (both begun in the 1430s). Second, the distinction between interior and exterior is made more ambiguous as much of the space is not enclosed, further throwing off traditional conceptions of architecture’s role of serving

programmatic functions. In addition, columns shift along two different axes, challenging the traditional consistent column grid. Like in the prior two houses, the design process is intended to escape the use of architectural form as a kind of decoration. Eisenman explains that in the design of this house "Choosing finishes, adding walls, [etc.] are no longer concerned with the purpose of fitting some preconceived idea of good taste or completing some 'set piece' scheme by either the owner or the architect."\textsuperscript{103} Further, he describes the owner of this house as an intruder "attempting to regain possession and consequently destroying, albeit in a positive sense, the initial unity and completeness of the architectural structure itself."\textsuperscript{104} This is the result of the "absence of traditional meaning that triggers this sense of exclusion, which then works dialectically to stimulate the owner to a new kind of participation in the house."\textsuperscript{105}

House IV (1971) is designed in similar process as House II by incorporating a limited set of rules in the design process, and by establishing a "code of spatial relationships within the syntactic domain of architectural language...both substance and indexical sign."\textsuperscript{106} This is considered another attempt to break free from authorial constraints and the conventions of materials and functions. In addition, this project continues to expand on the inversion of hierarchies of binary opposites, for example, "frontality/obliqueness," offering no preferred view by incorporating a similar complexity of formal composition on each of the four faces of the house. Whereas House II consisted of two offset volumes each divided into nine squares, House IV consists of one cube, also divided into nine squares, yet elements of the single cube here are shifted, extended,

\textsuperscript{103} Eisenman, “House III” in \textit{Tracing Eisenman}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Eisenman, “House IV,” ibid., p. 44.
rotated (90 degrees), and elongated in the x, y, and z directions according to consistent intervals (Figures 16 and 17). Here the design process becomes a direct dismantling of the Platonic object—or the abstracted classical object—and thus the role of the reader can be seen as a difficult (and in this case impossible) attempt to piece the object back together in the exact way it was designed. In fact, the symmetrical nine-square arrangement cannot really be read on any face of the house although small traces of it can be identified, and like in House II, this influences a greater and less clear variety of bay arrangements.

Figure 16: House IV transformation study, multiple axonometrics. Source: Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde, p. 56.
Figure 17: House IV transformation study, multiple axonometrics. Source: *Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde*, p. 57.

House VI (1972-1975) is designed using a "juxtaposition of solids and voids [that] produces a situation that is only resolved by the mind discovering a need to change their position."\(^{107}\) Thus, in this house, the strangeness of forms that are "obscured by cultural preconception" engages the spectator to try to understand their meaning. Here the nine-square volumes are further divided into smaller nine-square volumes, and volumes are offset along the z-axis obscuring the presence of the cube shape in the constructed house (Figure 18). The spaces of this house are defined by a series of planes that follow aspects of the original juxtaposition of volumes in orientation and shape, yet the volumes themselves are not easily perceived (Figure 19). Like in House IV, the forms of the house itself can be

\(^{107}\) Eisenman, “House VI,” ibid., p. 66.
considered merely remnants of the symmetrical, central bays that informed the design process, and the original cube is not easily identifiable in the final form. The columns are added as almost decorative elements (although they mark the grid), and take rectangular forms that often shift direction and change shape in plan at different elevations. This can be interpreted as a reversal of the hierarchy of elemental parts given to the column in classical architecture. In addition, while Houses II and III appear to be placed on high elevations of their sites, the ground is cut away from the edges of the House VI, eliminating any sort of base or plinth. Compared to Houses I-IV, House VI perhaps presents a more difficult to read relationship between object and process. While the elements within the house relate to each other (for example, the extension of a column with a gap in an adjacent wall along a consistent axis), it is difficult to relate them to the original cube volumes. Thus, this house can be seen to more effectively replace the classical object with the set of compositional rules derived from the classical tradition, detached from a clearly provided reading, although restricted to design process here.

Figure 21: Eisenman's abstraction of orders, dismantling of hierarchy of parts/proportion/symmetry/scale, etc. in columns in House I, II, III, VI, and Aronoff Center. Illustration by author.
Drawing on the notion of “misreading”—the unintended and ambiguous readings of the process-object of the houses, most noticeable in the complexity of House VI—House X (1975) intends to offer “a series of traces that refer, in a sense, to a more complex and incomplete structure rather than to a unitary, simple, and stable structure.”

The house consists of four juxtaposed cubes, with the center axes hollowed out and divided, reversing the modernist hierarchy of solid and void. The juxtaposition and differentiation of the cubes distorts singular views of the house, meaning to challenge the house as a “mimesis of anthropocentric man.”

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109 Ibid.
In addition, Robin Evans points out that this house blurs the distinction between model and drawing (in a much more direct way than the prior houses), thus challenging the classical ideal of representation.\textsuperscript{110} Evans compares this to Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz’s distortion of classical elements in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century as a way of coping with special cases of application (linking it to Eisenman’s fiction of representation, see Figure 23). While this project can be said to remain encompassed in a search for essence and autonomy, its challenge to designated meanings and relations of representation later becomes elaborated in a series of projects termed the “cities of artificial excavation.”

Figure 23: Guarino Guarini’s (1737) and Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz’s (1678) transformations of classical elements to correct perceptual distortions. Source: \textit{AA Files} (10), p. 71.

\textsuperscript{110} As opposed to Gandelsonas who argues that the transformation technique in this house applies to its design process and reading, architect Robin Evans argues that it rather occurs and achieves its significance in the conflation of two and three dimensions (axonometric drawing and model) through the construction of a partially collapsed model that mirrors the form of the drawing after the commission had been revoked. Mario Gandelsonas, “From Structure to Subject: The Formation of an Architectural Language,” in Peter Eisenman, \textit{House X}, New York: Rizzoli, 1985, p. 7-31; Robin Evans, "Not to be Used for Wrapping Purposes," \textit{AA Files}, 10, 1985, p. 68-78.
2.2 The “Cities of Artificial Excavation,” 1978-1988

The first project for the “cities of artificial excavation” is for Cannaregio in Venice (1978), which explores the designation of site and program, and as Hays notes, the project characterizes a shift in Eisenman’s work from structure to the “textualization of site.”

The project attempts to avoid the reproduction or “simulation” of the existing Venice but rather to construct a “fictitious Venice.” The grid from Le Corbusier’s prior hospital project in Venice is superimposed on the site, and variations of Eisenman’s House 11 are placed on the intersections of the grid (Figure 24). In addition, houses are scaled and placed inside houses blurring any clear ideas of function as being institutionally defined, for example, serving particular needs of program or physical structure.

The IBA Social Housing project in Berlin (1981-1985), located at the intersection of

Figures 24 and 25: Cannaregio plan; IBA Social Housing conceptual diagrams. Source: *Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde*, p. 86; *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman Complete Works*, p. 82.

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111 Hays, p. 59.
the Friedrichstrasse and the Berlin Wall, aims to “memorialize a place and to deny the efficacy of that memory.”

113 This involves the reconstruction of previous foundation walls through excavation, and the superimposition of the Mercator Grid in plan and the grid of the ground plane in elevation (Figure 25). Like at Cannaregio, there is a level of “fiction” involved in the creation of the plan, based on the existing location and the surrounding area.

Figures 26-27: Romeo and Juliet and Long Beach axonometric plans. Source: Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman Complete Works, p. 120, 130.

While not necessarily part of the “cities of artificial excavation,” the Romeo and Juliet project for the Venice Biennale in 1986 is worth mention here. The project incorporates a fictional narrative from the play Romeo and Juliet, in which the characters retreat to Verona, where the project is sited. Based on multiple versions of the play’s story, it is

113 Eisenman, “IBA Social Housing,” ibid., p. 80.
retold at different scales through architectural metaphors (Figure 26). Eisenman argues that this produces a condition where “Illusion and reality collide, past, present, and future remain in perpetual flux.”¹¹⁴ This, according to Eisenman, creates a “text of between; a fabric of images referring to something other than itself,” an “immanent text...not authorized by architecture” but rather by the program and site.¹¹⁵

In the project for the California State University at Long Beach (1986), Eisenman constructs a history of the site based on significant dates—for example, the settlement of California and the founding of the university. The forms are based on the overlapping of several historical maps, along with the superimposition of a future constructed by Eisenman (Figure 27). Once again, this suggests a blurring of a historical past, a present, and a fictitious future.

The last of the “cities of artificial excavation” projects is the design for a garden in Bernard Tschumi’s park in La Villette, Paris, France (1987) attempts to “replace the actual conditions of time, place, and scale with analogies of these conditions.”¹¹⁶ The past in this

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¹¹⁴ Eisenman, “Moving Arrows, Eros, and Other Errors,” ibid., p. 118.
project follows prior existing conditions of the site including an abattoir and city walls. The present is a scaled representation of Tschumi’s larger project surrounding the site, and on top of this a representation of Eisenman’s Cannaregio project is superimposed (Figure 28).

The “cities of artificial excavation” series to an extent abandons Eisenman’s prior methods of reinterpreting classical type forms as presented in the house series. However, they can be seen to expand Eisenman’s endeavor to make architectural design based to an extent in an inexpressive process—here as the layering of constructed site histories—and to also intentionally incorporate the accidental ambiguities of reading resulting from the house series. However, after the “cities of artificial excavation” projects, Eisenman’s project for the Aronoff Center for Design and Art can be seen to incorporate the use of classical type forms as developed in the house series along with the use of elements found within the site, although influencing a higher level of ambiguity and lower level of clarity in their reading and identification.
2.3 The Aronoff Center for Design and Art, 1988-1996

The Aronoff Center for Design and Art was commissioned in 1988 for the University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, Ohio, and would become part of the series of “signature buildings” integrated into the Hargeaves master plan officially begun in 1989. As architect Daniel S. Friedman points out, the use of “signature buildings” as well as the master plan itself can be seen to do more than “increase appreciation” of the campus or contribute symbolic capital; it also instills doubt by providing “an unflinching critique of the homogenization of knowledge and experience.” According to Friedman, this is a necessary aspect of a university, contrasted with an idealized community. Friedman points out that “the success of the master plan suggests the consistent application of... the unity of relation between part and whole...And yet the Hargreaves [plan]...introduces a modern landscape that fully escapes the orbit of classical habits...[The] whole is something all new construction should aim to renovate.” Thus, one can see the relevance of Eisenman’s work to the campus project, interpreted to challenge models without “becoming the model of the absence of models.”

The Aronoff Center project was to provide a link between three existing buildings with 145,000 square feet of space used for art, architecture, design, and planning instructions, exhibitions, critique, meeting rooms and administration. The new building

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was to add 128,000 square feet for the same purposes. Eisenman states that the design was to foster interaction, reduce crowding, be rooted in its site, and encourage critical inquiry. Upon its completion in 1996, the book *Eleven Authors in Search of a Building*—a collection of individual essays interpreting the building—was released. Nine architectural theorists were asked to contribute to the book, explaining their experiences in relation to their own work in architectural theory. As suggested in the literature review above, the publication overlooks the confirmation of the classical in the project. The classical formal elements within the building are as follows:

Firstly, the Aronoff Center is organized around a central axis both in plan and section, and perhaps can be described as one long central axis. The subtle S-shape that is formed by the repetition of the initial box volume is overlapped to produce three bays that are symmetrical in plan along their central axis (Figure 29). In the completed building, this is noticeable in the central stair since it is the most clearly defined element, encompassed by a solid wall to the north, and a termination of the floor plate with a ledge and row of columns to the south. However, the axis that the stair occupies is still somewhat obscured by a tilted elevation that follows the site contours as well as a bend in plan. In addition, stairs, floor plates, thick dropped ceilings, ledges, and partitions block continuous views through the bay; the ends narrow with the stairs and high partition walls yet the bay remains defined by columns. However, both edges of the bay remain clearly defined in the center of the building, the northern edge remains clearly defined on the west end of the building, and the southern edge remains clearly defined on the east end. At least one edge of each of the two northern bays is always defined by either colonnades or partitions on

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each floor. The southern bay is less clearly defined although aspects of its segments appear in built form. On the east entrance of the 3000 and 4000 levels it is defined by concrete and stucco forms applied to the exterior of the existing Wolfson building, as well as room partitions on the interior. It is complicated by the addition of a colonnade, floor plate, and skylight that follow the “chevron” shape of the existing DAAP building corridor. On the west end, it only appears as a form that protrudes the exterior shape of the building.

![Figure 29: Aronoff Center atrium overlap plan. Source: Eleven Authors in Search of a Building, p. 54.](image)

Secondly, the building surrounds a central atrium space. In section, the space is shifted from floor to floor, but characterized by double height overlapping space that penetrates each floor (Figure 30). On the 300 level, it mostly occupies the southern bay but merges with the central bay at points, for example at the eastern part of the exterior of the 3000 level entrance, and at the cantilevered hallway on the interior of the 4000 entrance and into the café space, interrupted by a ramp that links the addition to the existing
buildings. On the 4000 level, the atrium space shifts west following the rise in the site contours, defined by the southern edge of the central bay and the “chevron” shape, extending to the central stair on the south and east ends. On the 5000 level, this continues on the west end of the central stair, penetrating into a hallway following the central axis to the north and a hallway following the “chevron” edge to the south on the 6000 level (Figure 35). The atrium can be characterized as shifting from the bottom east to the top west of the building. Continuous views through it are blocked by dropped ceilings, thick ledges, and protruding volumes of rooms, and ramps.

Figure 30: Aronoff Center atrium overlap section. Source: Eleven Authors in Search of a Building, p. 54.

Thirdly, the two main entries to the building are classical entries, as they present a historical use of a kind of centrality. On the west end of the 5000 level, the main circulation spine splits off in two directions, one part following the north boundary of the axis, the other following the “chevron” line to the south, piercing through the existing Alms and DAAP buildings and weighing off the symmetry of the plan (although this could be
mistaken as not part of the addition). Lined with a colonnade, the southern wing terminates at a set of three symmetrically placed doors, centered in the wing, followed by an exterior overhang, stairway leading up to the entrance, and symmetrical rails echoing for example, one of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s methods of “placing man at the center” (Figure 31). But the doors on each side of the entry lock as well as the walls supporting the overhang are not orthogonally composed, the adjacent mullions off center them, and columns are placed in the center of the circulation path, restricting a centered, straight movement (Figure 34). On the east end of the 5000 level, the main circulation spine changes floor levels, pointing in the general direction of the other main entry, and again in unparallel, but less aligned direction. The 4000 level entry lock consists of three doors, centered in the part of the southern bay that occupies that area of the floor, in this case parallel on each side (Figure 33). Yet the perceived centeredness is thrown off by asymmetrical mullions around the doors, the ledge and change in elevation that divides the southern bay between the 3000 and 4000 levels, and the split of the entrance between the 3000 level below, offset with rails and columns to block a central, linear approach to the main atrium.

Fourthly, it is very easy to overlook the fact that the columns are classical columns because of the way they are sculpted from the base through the shaft to the capital. This sculpturing is Eisenman’s way of reinterpreting the classical tradition for our time. Whereas in several of Eisenman’s previous buildings the columns do not necessarily extend all the way from the floor to the ceiling, here they always do, and although they are not necessarily structural, they always signify—in Eisenman’s terms—the act of holding something up. The most apparent classical element is the colonnade. As mentioned above, the colonnade on the 5000 north/south-oriented wing interrupts the possibility for a centralized circulation through the wing. Instead of framing the individual subject in the center, they are offset in the corridor. While they are spaced at consistent intervals, those intervals are not the same on each side. In addition, their linearity is shifted as the colonnade continues into the entry lock (Figure 34). This is repeated along the east-west “chevron” line on the 5000 level as well. Along the 500 level stair, the colonnade defines the lower edge of the central axis of the building. They are estranged through slightly varied intervals, varying shapes, and differing axes of rotation, as well as following a slightly bent column line. On the east exterior of the 3000 level, the colonnade follows a similar pattern where one side is linear, and the column spacing on the other side.

Figure 36: Aronoff Center500 level photograph. Source: Eleven Authors in Search of a Building, p. 142.
follows the same spacing but a curved path (Figure 32). While some columns take form in the modernist expression of consistent planometric shape from floor to ceiling, they often change shape at different levels, reversing the classical system of shaping the columns from a larger diameter closer to their termination at the ground to a smaller diameter at their termination at the top. In addition, many columns have a hierarchy of parts—base, pedestal, entablature, etc.—applied in a nonhierarchical and asymmetrical fashion (See Figure 21). For example, the capitals on the columns that align the south edge of the central bay always only exist on one side of the column seen in profile. They do not follow established size or proportion, nor have inconsistent heights, and they are not necessarily wedged between the column below and the entablature above (Figure 36). The capital mouldings reverse the typical logic of the expression of strength, often cutting inward rather than protruding outward, and changes in capital shape often go from large to small upon their way up. The entablatures are never centered on any column, and often skip even appearing to rest on certain columns. The frieze is generally rendered in gray, and the cornice or architrave in white, although not consistently so. Most noticeable on the 5000 level, the columns’ parapets (low partitions), bases (benches), and pedestals are also never centered, and their caps are etched into the drywall rather than protruded out in form.

The fifth point is symmetry is applied to various parts of the interior of the building. In the classical building type, symmetry is applied to almost everything in elevation and plan from left to right and vise versa. While in plan here, the general symmetry of the central axis of the S-curve remains rather inconsistent as described above, symmetry is applied comparatively as decoration to several elements throughout the building; it exists from floor to ceiling (rather than wall to wall), or in elevation from top to bottom (rather
than side to side). For example, where floors are clad in tile, the patterns produced by changes in tile color or a termination at carpet for the most part are reflected in the ceiling directly above by light fixture patterns or changes in the elevation of the suspended gypsum board. At the 5000 level entry, it is between the handrails and the light fixtures above. At the center of the 6000 level, it can be seen between the mullions of the skylight above and the suspended “light grid” below (Figure 37). The individual parts of the columns mentioned above as well as many partial height walls include scored gaps that form two lines in the drywall, always at equal distances from the floor and the top of the element.

Sixth point is the iterations produced by mathematical formulas appear in several areas of the constructed building and can be seen as the classical system of proportion. As mentioned above, the colonnades that follow the “chevron” present this by the consistent spacing of columns on one side and the doubling of that spacing on the other. This can also be seen in the 5000 level stair, where each repetition of three consecutive stair risers flanked by a column is gradually

Figure 37: Aronoff Center skylight and light grid over 400 level central space as seen from 600 level classroom photograph. Source: Eleven Authors in Search of a Building, p. 129.

Figure 38: Aronoff Center interlocking between phases. Source: Eleven Authors in Search of a Building, p. 57.
spaced further apart in a linear order. In other parts of the building it is less obvious as the amount of complex formal procedures overloads the senses. It can be seen as well on the eastern façade where the box volumes follow a gradual displacement through both rotation in section and shifting in plan that is expressed by the profile created to the north and the level of the floor plates mirrored by the rotation of the glazing (Figure 38). It is difficult to read the northern façade due to the amount of changes that occur along the length of it as well as the inability to view it as whole are obstructed by both the bend in plan and mound of grass and trees in front of it.

And lastly, the application of vertical elements to the exterior of the building is a classical stylistic device. As Eisenman thoroughly argues in the essay “From Golden Lane to Robin Hood Gardens: Or If You Follow the Brick Road, It May Not Lead to Golders Green” (1973), Alison and Peter Smithson’s application of vertical mullions to the exterior of the Robin Hood Gardens project can be “iconically expressive”—or classicist and expressionist.121 While several vertical elements appear on the exterior of the Aronoff Center—such as the columns on the 4000 level entry and the painted bearing wall that extends to

![Figure 39: Aronoff Center exterior photograph. Source: Eleven Authors in Search of a Building, p. 77.](image)

the adjacent parking garage—they are only consistent or extensive in one area. The western half of the northern side of the building's exterior is articulated with deep pilasters that rest on a kind of plinth formed by the floor below (Figure 39). They are structural but do not appear to be since they terminate in the air. So how then does this differ from the Smithsons’ application of vertical elements? For one, they follow the logic of the spacing of the structural grid. But this does not explain their excessive protrusion and mantling. They exist like this on only one part of the building and it is the one part that nobody ever sees. This is due to the contours of the surrounding landscape to the northwest including trees that block one’s sight, and the fact that there is no reason for anybody to go to that part of the exterior.
2.4 Synthesis of Findings

In the progression of the house projects, one finds the development of a method that seeks to free the process of design and establish meaning based on an independent language. Utilitarian restraints are dismissed in favor of a process that establishes form with little authorial intention. The result of this relatively arbitrary approach to form making is an ambiguity and obscurity that forces the spectator to come to terms with the space itself. Classical rules of representation are reinterpreted in a number of ways—the replacement of perspectival projection with axonometric projection that allows for design devices to be used without reference to experience, the removal of humanly-scaled proportion in place of a set of arbitrarily chosen compositional rules and Platonic forms, the reversal of prior established hierarchies of formal elements, the replacement of expression of function with expression of design process, etc.—in order to introduce a kind of subjective textual reading of space. This can be seen as an attempt to both restore and dissolve the rules of classical architecture, to bring them into relevance in hopes that they will no longer govern practice in a way irrelevant to their cultural functions (such as Eisenman’s description of modernism’s continuation of the “fictions” of the classical).

The “cities of artificial excavation” projects take on a much different nature in their forms, although they continue to develop similar objectives as the houses. While the later abandon the desire for prescribed readings as introduced in the early houses, they still aim to reconstruct the void left by the understanding of architectural history’s precepts as a series of “fictions.” In other words, they aim to develop a method of certainty—although “truth” here is replaced with “fiction”—in design without succumbing to the repetition of prior forms of humanism, as can be seen, for example, in the complete removal of
programmatic function from all but one of the projects. However, they aim to invert prior architectural forms such as the uses of outlines and negatives for existing structures on the site, or the overlapping of works (including Eisenman’s own), in ways that diminish any form of use, function, and in some instances clarity of identification from their prior uses. The method developed in these projects can largely be seen as an abandonment or complete inversion of the classical tradition’s specific forms without abandoning its reliance on reinterpreted established devices in design.

The Aronoff Center incorporates aspects developed in both the house projects and the “cities of artificial excavation”—such as the use of rational design methods, centrality, and symmetry in ways that produce estranged forms, as well as the modification of existing site elements to blur the distinction between old and new—but introduces the application of classical stylistic type forms. However, while in much of the postmodern style’s application of classical forms, the borrowed elements are immediately identifiable, here the forms are hidden, altered, and made unrecognizable. This can be seen as largely an attempt to decrease their received historical relevance without rejecting their existence and influence on architectural design—in other words, to rework their diminishing meaning for different uses in contemporary design and/or hope that they disappear, which is not to be confused with merely applying them as simulacral referents to contemporary buildings.

So far, from the formal characteristics of these projects as described above, the projects can be interpreted as being part of an endeavor to transform the understanding of meaning in what Eisenman considers the “fictions” of architecture from the fifteenth century to the present. But one must ask if the results of this process actually produce any new form of meaning or merely replicate the very conditions they are supposed to be in
opposition to. In other words, to what extents is their paradoxical nature transformative and to what extents is it regressive? Yet the formal analysis above is not yet sufficient for us to draw a conclusion, so it is imperative to examine the discourses and the criticisms surrounding these projects.
3. The Fiction of Reason

Reactions to the Formation of Truth
in Eisenman’s Theoretical Discourse in the 1980s
3.1 Eisenman’s Criticism and Reconsideration of Houses I-VI

In the 1980s, Eisenman began rethinking some of the objectives set forth in his house experiments, and identifying aspects of the paradox produced by the anti-ideology ideological nature of the projects. In his most direct and complete retrospective criticism of the houses, “Misreading Peter Eisenman” which he published in 1987, Eisenman identifies that “the history of architecture can be seen as the continual rereading, and misreading, of the metaphysic of architecture through successive dislocations, and the subsequent institutionalization of each dislocation, which thereby reconstitutes the metaphysic.” Of course Eisenman’s house projects would ultimately be continuous with this process but the question remains: how do these projects break free from prior practices of stylistic innovation?

Eisenman suggests that in other practices—projects of the Modern Movement in architecture—the new was previously disguised or believed as necessarily being a dislocation, and was to serve institutions. For example, this includes the functionalist aesthetic developed in the early twentieth century—which was to replace compositional rules with rational design techniques—as a form of the classical. In contrast, he suggests that Houses III and VI implement an alternative process of form making that is freed from functional considerations, resulting in unpredictable changes to the nature in the uses of the spaces. In addition, these houses implement a challenge to convention and the passive acceptance of the authoritative conventional object. Comparing these houses to the conventional object—whose referent is “the human body, traditional or indigenous

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constructions, or some preformed classical system of meaning”—K. Michael Hays points out:

Strategies of defamiliarization and estrangement, by contrast [to the traditional], attempt to make the processes of the object’s production and the mechanisms of its representation part of its content. The object does not attempt to pass itself off as unquestionable, but rather to lay bare the devices of its own formation so that the viewer will be encouraged to reflect critically on the particular, partial ways in which it is constituted, the particular ways it takes its place.\footnote{123}

Hays describes a rather ideal situation that requires a certain level of knowledge about disciplinary conventions, and ultimately relies on a certain level of clarity and consistency within the design processes. And this is not to say that Eisenman dismisses conventional architectural referents, but rather estranges them. A cube divided into bays is an abstraction of the conventional or classical architectural object—although already powerful in its abstraction—that is further estranged through methods of shifting, rotating, etc.

But this emphasis on architecture as either serving or not serving established functions once again returns to a paradox, and to a retreat to the classical as non-fictitious. As architectural theorist Nana Last points out: “……Eisenman’s epistemology remains under the influence of functionalist thinking in his foregrounding of function (even in the negative) and in his not questioning the hegemony of functionalism in society…It is not so much the emphasis on function or object presence per se that brings Eisenman’s thinking in line with functionalist and positivist dictates, but his posing of these (or any) requirements as a priori.”\footnote{124} For example, this can be seen one of Eisenman’s early

\footnote{124 Nana Last, “Conceptualism’s (Con)quests: On Reconceiving Art and Architecture,” \textit{Harvard Design Magazine}, Fall 2003/Winter 2004, p. 19. Last argues out that both}
attempts to differentiate “conceptual architecture” from conceptual art, in one instance stating that architecture “will always contain the ideas of functional and semantically weighted objects such as walls, bathrooms, closets, doors, ceilings. There is no conceptual aspect in architecture which can be thought of without the concept of pragmatic and functional objects, otherwise it is not an architectural conception.”\textsuperscript{125}

And of course, the “cities of artificial excavation” projects in general would reverse this equation by removing any of these elements. In another example, which predates the use of “absence” in the “cities of artificial excavation,” Eisenman describes modernism’s “theoretical assumptions of functionalism” as “cultural rather than universal.” He states that: “Post-functionalism, thus, is a term of absence. In its negation of functionalism it suggests certain positive theoretical alternatives—existing fragments of thought which, when examined, might serve as a framework for a larger theoretical structure.”\textsuperscript{126} But as Last points out, this foregrounds function in the negative, missing the possibility for an effective critique of functionalism—or to effectively question the deterministic nature of functionalism in architecture. In addition, to Last, Eisenman “failed to recognize conceptualism’s challenge to essence itself,” which includes disciplinary and programmatic boundaries.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{127} Last, p. 15.
However, Eisenman retrospectively recognizes this crux in the early house projects although it is questionable whether he in fact moves away from it in the 1980s. His insistence on disciplinary boundaries can be seen as perhaps necessary at the time to ensure the possibility of a transformation of the architectural object, even if this transformation is viewed as unsuccessful. In addition, it can be argued that Eisenman’s placement of function as secondary in the design process can lead to unexpected and unconventional uses of the spaces produced, although this argument generally proves to be undeveloped as an ideal belief. However, what Last refers to as “Eisenman’s epistemology,” the acceptance of architecture as defined by function, is not to be confused with the creation or use of classical rules of representation—for example, the replacement of perspective with axonometric projection, the use of classical bays and intervals, etc.—in these projects as it was necessary to their implementation of design processes. As art critic Hal Foster argues, “the form-making of avant-garde design [during this time in Eisenman’s career had developed] to such a point that it had to confront (once again) its own modernist dilemma: but how, given this apparent freedom, to motivate architectural decisions?”

Once the imperatives of the Modern Movement became understood as constructed, or as “fictions,” it left a more dangerous than liberating clean slate that influenced a desire for complete freedom in design among many architects. Foster continues: “It was largely an engagement with modes of representation that saved Eisenman…from the willful shape-changing of [Frank] Gehry and his followers.” While Foster’s argument is produced at a much later time, his claim here should not be

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129 Ibid.
overlooked because it describes the very condition that Eisenman’s emphasis on what can be termed “authorlessness” or the voiding of expression attempts to avoid. To Foster, Gehry’s and others’ “vision[s] of expression and freedom [in design are] oppressive” because of their exclusionary nature supported by individuality and a continuity with spectacle culture.130 In addition, Foster argues that these works, in their continuities with or contributions to the oppressive conditions of broader contemporary culture, are ultimately disrespectful of their immediate and larger sites, which includes media reproduction. When describing Gehry’s work, Foster writes: “the artist is the only social figure allowed to be freely expressive in the first place...Hence his free expression implies our unfree inhibition...he represents freedom more than he enacts it...Gehry does indeed design out of ‘the cultural logic’ of advanced capitalism, in terms of its language of risk-taking and spectacle effects.”131

Thus Eisenman’s proclamation of and desire for “the end of the classical” is coupled with a fear of Foster’s description of “freedom.” In the design projects mentioned above, Eisenman’s goal can be considered a reinterpretation of the classical design tradition in order to avoid this condition. For example, in an interpretation of Mies van der Rowe’s work, Eisenman states: “The key here is the reintroduction of classical elements (axiality, symmetry, etc.) in a non-classical manner. This contamination is not so much a dialectical insertion of the classical into the modern (the object into the text) as it is a damming up or a transgression of the classical. It is presented in the context of a rupture with traditional

131 Ibid., p. 40-41.
representation.”132 And one needs only to turn to the elements in the Aronoff Center project described above to see Eisenman’s expansion of this process—the reintroduction of classical elements in a typically “non-classical manner.”

But the question remains: how does the use of the classical—or an estrangement of the classical—differ from the mutation of the classical? Addressing this question requires an acknowledgement of Eisenman’s text “The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Differentiation” (1984), in which he argues that the “futile object and the process of decomposition are no longer arbitrary objects and anomalous processes, nor a mutation of classicism.”133 In this essay, he describes a process of “decomposition” that avoids beginning with a “type form” or a “ground zero.”134 And one needs only to return to the house projects to witness a process from “ground zero”—the cube—followed by a series of mutations, often similar to classical conventions. Of course one can argue, as Eisenman does that this process “has no direct relationship to an ideal past but only a memory of that past, and a future that is only in the present. In a futureless present—an ‘immanent’ immanence—there is a removal of the extrinsic, conventional identity and the significance of the object.”135

And thus the difference occurs in the reading of the object as requiring no particular experiential explanation, but a series of fragments, seemingly avoiding any kind of totalization of the subject. The contradiction of origin remains however, and is further complicated by statements such as “when [the capacity of meaning to be inherent in an

134 Ibid., p. 185.
135 Ibid.
object] is denied, it becomes the ultimate negation of the classical”\textsuperscript{136} or “Decomposition proposes an autonomy that is as universal as the classical or the modern.”\textsuperscript{137}

So one finds that the problem occurs when this endeavor replaces old “truths” and becomes a new “truth” in itself. In “Misreading Peter Eisenman,” he writes:

[Houses I through IV] depended on certain themes...—the search for the essence of the sign, the transformation of form to produce autonomy, and so forth—which were later seen to be grounded in the very anthropomorphic metaphysic that they were intended to contravene. The search for essence and autonomy was none other than a search for an ultimate center and truth, and therefore contradictory to the effort to dislocate architecture from its metaphysic of center.\textsuperscript{138}

While one can argue (as Last does) that Eisenman never fully moves away from the “metaphysic” of architecture as requiring a definition, his retrospective response to the acceptance of “autonomy” in his early house projects requires attention. As Eisenman suggests, the concept of autonomy—in this case referring to architectural meaning existing exclusively in the object—proposes an end and contradicts the goal of open-endedness in his endeavor. So, how then does Eisenman propose a shift from this tendency? How does, he propose to realize an architecture that cannot be distilled into an essence, and does not refer back to an origin, that does not reify the functional object or impose a specificity of scale, place, and time?

Eisenman argues that the work after Houses I-VI moves away from an established meaning toward more complex, multiple, and unforeseen meanings. He states that the work thereafter “moves from a concern with the object as ideal essence...to the object as

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 186.
dislocating text, that is, to the incorporation of fiction and error.”139 He continues to argue that it is “perhaps best seen as a series of palimpsests, a dynamic locus of figures and partially obscured traces...they refuse any single authoritative reading. Their ‘truth’ is constantly in flux.”140

However, it is difficult to argue that the work at this time, the 1980s, moves further away from the classical models. Eisenman states: “The moralistic, modernist imperative of the early work—the ‘stripping down,’ the ‘baring of the essential elementness,’ the ‘anti-functionalism,’ the avoidance of typologies and so on—which, like the classical, affirmed rather than destabilized the institution—have become as common and ‘valueless’ as any other association.”141 He continues, “fiction acknowledges itself as the absence of a singular truth, while continuously positing a variety of subversive ‘truths’; in other words, it decenters while it centers.”142 Although it is argued that this process still reaffirms the role of the classical in architecture, we shall see that it comes with further ambiguity between transformation of and retreat to the classical tradition.

139 Ibid., p. 223.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid., p. 223-224.
142 Ibid., p. 224.
3.2 Jacques Derrida’s Influence and Criticism of Eisenman’s Work

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida contributed to the last project of the “cities of artificial excavation” for La Villette and his criticisms of Eisenman’s work require consideration. While Derrida’s work did not directly enter into Eisenman’s theoretical trajectory until the early 1980s—and it is questionable to what extents Derrida’s work influenced or was appropriated to Eisenman’s work—Eisenman’s endeavor to move away from the foundations of classical architecture always had certain similarities with Derrida’s project to move away from the metaphysical foundations of philosophy. After working on the theoretical background for the La Villette garden project—this collaboration was proposed to both Eisenman and Derrida by Bernard Tschumi—Derrida contributed the essay titled “Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books” (1988). In this essay, Derrida describes Eisenman’s work as undermining visual and textual distinctions in architecture—“architecture as a kind of writing”—an argument that is rather directly continuous with Eisenman’s own theoretical arguments at the time.

In this text, Derrida proclaims that “Eisenman is, in the realm of architecture…the most anti-Wagnerian creator of our time.”143 Derrida continues, “I propose to note that architectural value, the very axiom of architecture that Eisenman begins by overturning, is the measure of man, that which proportions everything to a human, all too human scale.”144 And of course, this, as Derrida briefly mentions, can be directly observed in the design process for the Romeo and Juliet project, where the different narratives are superimposed

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144 Ibid., p. 173. The references to humanism here as well as the title of the essay are references to Friedrich Nietzsche’s Ecce Homo.
onto the site plan without regard for their relation to a human scale (see Figure 16). This design process exists as well in any of the “cities of artificial excavation” projects (aside from aspects of the Berlin project which will be discussed). Derrida recalls that this process is to challenge “presence and origin” in architectural representation and aesthetics. He suggests that Eisenman’s work “does not simply develop a metalanguage on (or about) a certain traditional authority of discourse in architecture” but invents a kind of architecture that is free from the constructions of traditional discourse.145

Elaborating on the challenge to “presence and origin,” Derrida explains his work for La Villette, particularly the nature of the title Choral Work, given to the project by Eisenman. The title—developed out of a process of aiming toward the criteria of being “economical,” integral to the project, and indeterminate in its meaning—avoids the gathering of collective meaning in a similar fashion to the design of the project itself. The term “chora”—originally referring to Plato’s definition as a point of origin—altered to “choral” offers indeterminate interpretations or “misreadings” of its meaning and further guides the project through its varying readings, for example, the implication of a choreographic or musical dimension—later producing Derrida’s contribution of the form of a sieve—derived from Plato’s text on “chora,” Timeaus—or lyre to the design (Figure 40). And thus, as Eisenman also suggests of his designs: this open-endedness “does not allow of totalisation.”146

But there is more to this than just an indeterminacy of address. As Derrida states: “the structure of our title...[has] the dynamics of an immanent invention. Everything is

145 Ibid., p. 174.
146 Ibid., p. 180.
found inside but it is almost unforeseeable.”

One can argue that in the design of the project for La Villette, the inside here not only refers to processes of association but also refers more broadly to the “totality,” the “whole,” everything from Tschumi’s park, to the larger context, to the classical discourse of architecture. Thus the project is seen as a reinterpretation, a dismantling of its very foundations it seeks to depart from. And as Derrida points out, this process or “labyrinth” has no presence and “never shows itself.” And therefore, it is not a truth.

So far, this argument seems to describe Eisenman’s work well. However, this argument may perhaps not be as straightforward—even in all of its plays of words and associations—as it may seem. Before further complicating this argument, let us first return to Hays’s description of Eisenman’s work as a kind of “repetition” with particular regards to the “cities of artificial excavation” projects. As Derrida points out, it is not necessarily clear which of Eisenman’s projects Derrida is referring to in the prior essay, and although Hays’s description is more clearly directed, it applies to more than just the Cannaregio project, the focus of Hays’s essay.

Hays argues that Eisenman’s work is not about the “new,” but is about the repetition of the very conditions it must succumb to as a result of a change in “History.” Or in other words, Eisenman has no choice but to be a part of

Figure 40: Jacques Derrida, sketch proposal from letter to Peter Eisenman, May 30, 1986. Source: Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde, p. 87.

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147 Ibid., p. 177.
the system that he is to an extent objecting to in his work. And Hays as well argues that the work would inevitably become dissolved in the system, a result that can only be explained as part of “History’s contradictions.” As is previously explained in reference to the house projects, this operates through “strategies of defamiliarization and estrangement” and these strategies continue to develop throughout the “cities of artificial excavation” projects, although their referents become less determinate. Hays’s overall argument is incredibly significant and influential to the argument presented here, but it ends at the disintegration of Eisenman’s work in the late 1980s, and the consequences after that—although Hays alludes to them and they can be argued to be well-known by now—remain relevant as they increasingly continue in the realm of architectural practice. For example, the particular argument that Eisenman’s architecture-as-drawing in the Cannaregio project has maintained its effectiveness as criticism by avoiding “the hard floor of building practice” may not be as clear as it seems.\textsuperscript{150}

In reference to Cannaregio (and also the Berlin project), Hays argues:

Here Eisenman confronts, squarely and architecturally, what Benjamin Buchloh has described as ‘the essential dilemma’ of conceptual art of the mid-1960s: ‘the conflict between structural specificity and random organization...’ The random, arbitrary assignment, even invention of archaeological content in Venice and Berlin opposes the empty, geometrical tautologies of the grid; the historical permeability of concrete architectural form opposes the structure’s utter occlusion of any historical reference.\textsuperscript{151}

This is difficult to disagree with, and while it seems as though Hays is using an argument that would generally be considered as an antithesis to Eisenman’s work here in an unconventional way, it presents a set of issues regarding the reception of Eisenman’s work. And therefore Buchloh’s argument deserves some consideration. It should be noted as well

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p. 86.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 72.
that Buchloh was responding to a renewed interest in conceptual art in the late 1980s, and his criticism ultimately took form as an attack of it as always being tautological, a criticism that Eisenman’s work is not necessarily entirely exempt from. For example, although referring to works that Eisenman’s work only has some continuities with, Buchloh states:

the modernist compulsion for empiricist self-reflexiveness not only originated in the scientific positivism which is the founding logic of capitalism…but that, for an artistic practice that internalized this positivism by insisting on a purely empiricist approach to vision, there would be a final destiny [that] would be to aspire to the condition of tautology.152

So far, it is clear that Eisenman intends and perhaps succeeds in avoiding completely confirming this condition. However, Buchloh continues to argue that

aesthetic experience—as an individual and social investment of objects with meaning—is constituted by linguistic as well as by specular conventions, by the institutional determination of the object’s status as much as by the reading competence of the spectator.153

This, to Buchloh, is a problem of “institutional power and ideological and economic investment.”154 And it is here that one begins to see the challenge to Eisenman’s project presented by the lack of seeming clarity in identifying disciplinary conventions. And lastly, Buchloh names several paradoxes of conceptual art:

that the critical annihilation of cultural conventions itself immediately acquires conditions of the spectacle, that the insistence on artistic anonymity and the demolition of authorship produces instant brand names and identifiable products, and that the campaign to critique conventions of visuality with textual interventions...ends by following the preestablished mechanisms of advertising and marketing campaigns.155

153 Ibid., p. 134.
154 Ibid., p. 136.
155 Ibid., p. 140.
Thus, we are presented with the contradiction that the institutionalization of Eisenman’s techniques conflicts with Eisenman’s endeavor to purge techniques related to vision, skill, image, etc. Yet at the same time, we are also presented with the fact that Eisenman never fully purges prior disciplinary conventions or specific site characteristics from his work.

This then leads to the question of Eisenman’s “repetition,” which Hays validly argues is critically inscribed in the work, in addition to arguing that the paradoxical nature of the work is more “performative” than regressive. Similar to Eisenman’s argument that architecture consists of dislocations and institutionalizations of its metaphysic, Hays argues that Eisenman’s work can be seen as the “conjunction of the pleasure of repeating ‘a comfortable practice of reading’ with the jouissance of imposing ‘a state of loss.’”\(^{156}\) Hays continues:

> Reading [the house] projects reproduces within the viewer the pleasure of the paradigms of culture the viewer has internalized—the genre of the single-family house, for example, or the articulation and legibility of forms and procedures still overseen by the symbolic authority of architectural institutions behind the seen...authority is removed, then reconstituted.\(^{157}\)

In Cannaregio, the absence of a defined signified, to Hays, while conforming to a larger architectural order, ultimately points to the inadequacy of architectural signs. The ultimate goal of this process is to produce a condition where architecture can be approached anew, only after becoming aware of a loss “latent in the modernism on which Eisenman’s work is based.”\(^{158}\)

This is a fair and ideal argument, but it still leaves us with the problem of image and reception. Hays points out that Cannaregio, by remaining within “the problematic of

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\(^{156}\) Hays, p. 83.

\(^{157}\) Ibid.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., p. 85.
representation”—the never-to-be-built—maintains its effectiveness. However, this is no longer the case, and it is questionable whether it was in the late 1980s when Eisenman was continuing to develop the method introduced in Cannaregio. And in the “cities of artificial excavation” projects, one can see a certain level of conflict between representation and construction. As architectural theorist Eric Lum points out:

For those projects that exist solely on paper...[the] rapidly decreasing intervals between the initial publication of a project, its recirculation in media streams, and its inevitable imitation in architectural studios form a now essential economy of images in contemporary architectural culture. In other words, this form of production increasingly leans towards the influence of the reception of architecture as mere image-production, rather than influencing an understanding of these specific works as a critique of this condition. And while it may escape the problems that come with translation to a functional object, its inclusion in academic circles does not guarantee its independence from the more restricting demands of culture in general.

In relation to this, Hays does suggest that Eisenman’s work is “in its representation of a culture dispossessed of meaning, obedient.” In addition, he argues that Eisenman confronts this contradiction of representation in the construction of the Berlin project: the contradiction of “the functionalization of the dysfunctional diagram and the aestheticization of the conceptual sign” as a “reluctance to accept the complete disintegration of the aesthetic object” (see Figure 15). Hays continues:

159 Ibid., p. 85.
161 Hays, p. 86.
162 Ibid.
Yet it is just this performative contradiction (the refused destiny, its cynical truth claim) that gives the built work its power: it repeats the objective conditions under which any work of architecture in the present must be produced—the constant struggle against two equally intolerable poles of mere obedient service to existing institutions and mere aesthetic voluntarism. Before hoping to surpass this contradiction, Eisenman must perforce repeat it. Such unresolved antagonisms of reality reappear in architectural form.\footnote{163}

But one must ask if these “objective conditions” are as controlling as Hays implies. To return to Lum’s argument, the attempt to “negate the material aspects of...architecture has permeated its schematic diagram and photogenic appearance, suppressing the material particulars of its construction” (although Eisenman would later challenge this in the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 1998-2005).\footnote{164} Lum points to another contradiction here—that the suppression of materiality can be more photogenic than an intentional challenge to materiality, such as a critical reevaluation of material and construction practices—and this contradiction permeates the majority of Eisenman’s work. Lum, like Eisenman and contrary to Last, is arguing for the differences between conceptual art and architecture. However, contrary to Eisenman, Lum argues:

The strategies of conceptual art grew out of concerns with the conditions of its production, its display, and its aura; architecture—conceptual or not—operates differently...[Architects] have rarely participated in the constructions of their designs...Whereas conceptual art attempted to question its conventional display and market, if anything, ‘high concept’ architecture seems to rely on its institutional display in order to legitimate its operations...[Conceptual] artists attempted to dispel [object singularity]; in distinction, the architectural object’s distinctiveness is precisely that which imparts it aura.\footnote{165}

To Lum, architecture such as Eisenman’s is inevitably presented as “art” and thus operates as “a specific kind of cultural commodity.”\footnote{166} And while Eisenman’s work can be seen to be

\footnote{163} Ibid.  
\footnote{164} Lum, p. 8.  
\footnote{165} Ibid., p. 6.  
\footnote{166} Ibid.
grounded in architectural history, it never fully addresses the "widening gap between conceptual thinking and building construction" partly influencing its "reliance on presentation and reception of the conceptual through superficial forms rather than underlying critical intentions."167 Thus, there is a thin line between critical repetition and tautology in the work here. And to acknowledge this distinction, it is important to consider where Eisenman’s work loses its effectiveness as criticism—or when the work no longer relevantly “dislocates.”

To briefly return to the argument made in Derrida’s essay above, it is important to acknowledge that the conflation of visual and textual analysis and production had already been criticized as failing to escape traditional constructions of hierarchy (although it should be noted that Derrida is not necessarily describing the visual and textual as interchangeable but rather as interdependent). Referring to the argument made in “Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books,” cultural theorist Julia Thomas suggests that the method Derrida describes in this essay, “the convergence of the textual and visual” can be seen as “far from ‘outside traditional hierarchies.’”168 She points out that some critics “argue that such ‘linguistics-based’ theories establish a textual model of the world that is hierarchical and even ‘imperialist’” and this view is echoed in Benjamin Buchloh’s argument above.169 For example, art historian David Summers—who is referring not specifically to Derrida’s argument but rather more generally to the belief in linguistics as an all-encompassing model, and whose general argument here is strikingly similar to Hays’s interpretation of Eisenman’s work above—argues that:

167 Ibid., p. 10, 12.
169 Ibid.
Although what we mean by art and what we mean by language are in various instances continuous, parallel or overlapping relative to one another...they are...absolutely different from one another, and that at the deepest levels the significance of art is to be found in an area of prelinguistic certainty.\(^{170}\)

In other words, image is not the same as text, and thus language is not in itself adequate to explain the visual—a concept art historian W.J.T. Mitchell has termed "linguistic imperialism."\(^{171}\) It should be noted as well that Summers here is drawing from what art historian Ernst Gombrich has posed as the “riddle of style”—why different ages and nations have represented the world in different ways—and this necessarily requires a consideration of the conditions of representation.\(^{172}\) Although Eisenman shows some of these concerns—for example, Eisenman’s criticism of the “fiction of representation,” as well as his goal of freeing classical forms of representation from anthropocentric functions—there is a certain lack of acknowledgement of the limits of formal analysis and desire to expel image from architectural production in place of text in his designs and writings, and one should ask if Eisenman’s work mirrors the very forms of representation he is opposing. The problem occurs when the inevitable power that image has in reception is dismissed. For example, Summers states:

The image of the emperor in the provinces is a literal embodiment and extension of the emperor’s power. Power is potency, the ability to act, to dictate, judge and punish, and the image stands for that power. Conquest is not simply military subjugation and pacification, it is the imposition of rituals and patterns of life, the making and setting up of images of gods and rulers. Because an image is ‘of’ the emperor...it is ultimately authored by the emperor and states his authority...But the

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same images may also be destroyed and mutilated for reasons entirely consistent with their having been set up in the first place; they are destroyed as ways of destroying imposed and alien order and authority, or they are destroyed for the purpose of asserting and imposing new order and authority by means of new images.  

And of course, this can be seen to parallel Eisenman’s concept of “dislocating text.” The only problem is that it ignores what Summers refers to as the context of its presentation.

Summers concludes:

> These conditions of presentation necessarily occupy the space we share with them, and it is in this space that images (and architecture...) uniquely articulate and create meaning. Seen from such a standpoint, ‘linguistic imperialism’ begins to look more like what I think it is: an episode in modernist formalism, and therefore in modernist iconoclasm.

Thus, the argument that Eisenman undermines the distinction between text and image in these projects comes with complication, and it is perhaps necessary to address another of Derrida’s criticisms of Eisenman’s work, presented as a letter that ultimately ended their collaboration. While Derrida’s letter can perhaps seem to contradict the first of his essays presented here and can be easy to ignore, it points right at the crux of Eisenman’s endeavor, and should indeed be considered alongside the essay “Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books.” And if one is to accept Derrida’s statement that he has “always tried to [look for whatever in a work represents its force of resistance] by respecting the individual signature of an Artaud, say or an Eisenman,” then one should expect that Derrida’s provocative letter is intended to raise a series of questions necessary

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173 Summers., p. 247.
174 Ibid., p. 257.
to continue Eisenman’s project. As the aesthetician Stephen David Ross suggests, Derrida in this letter asks some of the most enigmatic and deepest questions that might be asked about any art. Even if we think that Derrida on the whole is playing with Eisenman, how can we ignore the questions he asks him? Especially what of glass?...In French, ‘glas’ means funeral bell. What in art of death? What in architecture of glass?

In Derrida’s “Letter to Peter Eisenman” (1990), he suggests the possibility of the aestheticization of Eisenman’s method of design as developed in the “cities of artificial excavation” projects, and he suggests as well an attention to the reception of his writing and design work. And from Eisenman’s change in design methodology in the late 1970s, as well as his writings in the mid to late 1980s (for example, “Misreading Peter Eisenman”), one can assert that Eisenman was perhaps anticipating Derrida’s proposition. In fact, in a postscript to the letter, Derrida describes Eisenman’s comments in an interview, in which Eisenman “spontaneously” attempts to detach his work from “deconstruction.” Referring to Eisenman’s use of the word “absence,” Derrida states:

This discourse on absence or the presence of absence perplexes me not only because it bypasses so many tricks, complications, traps that the philosopher, especially if he is a bit of a dialectician, knows only too well...but also because it has authorized many religious interpretations, not to mention vaguely judeo-transcendental ideologizations, of your work.

This suggests that Eisenman’s work—as he argues of his early house projects—can once again be seen to attempt to replace the preceding Modernist architectural discourse, just as that discourse can be seen to replace the preceding classical discourse, and the classical

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discourse can be seen to replace its preceding religious-based discourse. Derrida continues: “Whether it has to do with houses, museums, or the laboratories of research universities, what distinguishes your architectural space from that of the temple[?]...Where will the break, the rupture have been in this respect[?]”¹⁷⁸ One would suspect that these provocative propositions and questions would essentially contradict not only Eisenman’s work, but Derrida’s as well. However, they are perfectly in line with both Eisenman’s and Derrida’s projects.

In order to make this argument clear, it is useful to acknowledge the philosopher Richard Rorty’s—who presents a concern with “death in art” (or more specifically in philosophy) similar to Derrida’s as mentioned by Ross above—criticism of Derrida’s project, and this criticism applies perhaps in a greater extent to Eisenman’s work. Rorty argues that aspects of Derrida’s early work (particularly before The Truth in Painting) often lead his project into traps of attempting to replace and therefore fall back into the very metaphysical foundations of philosophy that Derrida attempts to debunk. This is not to be confused with the endeavor to suggest “how things might look” without the influence of metaphysics, but rather that it is countered by the implications of the negative as an only option. One example is Derrida’s proclamation that his notion of the “trace” does not exist. Rorty suggests that “if you want to know what notion takes the place of God for a writer in the onto-theological tradition, always look for the one he says does not exist.”¹⁷⁹ In this sense, Derrida’s concepts can have a tendency to eclipse normative thought, when in fact the relevance of his writing exists in its coexistence with or opposition to normative

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.
though. And of course, these concepts ultimately become “new ‘subject matter’ for his followers.” However, Rorty argues that Derrida later moves away from this tendency through the development of varying styles of writing relevant only to the discipline of philosophy. Rorty states that the consequences of this mean giving up the idea that Derrida has constructed a ‘deconstructive method’ which ‘rigorously’ shows how the higher of a pair of opposed concepts...‘deconstructs itself.’ Concepts do not kill anything, even themselves; people kill concepts...It takes a lot of hard work to produce such special effects as ‘presence is just a special case of absence’ or ‘use is but a special case of mentioning.’ Nothing except a lack of ingenuity stands in the way of any such recontextualization, but there is no method involved, if a method is a procedure which can be taught by reference to rules.\(^{181}\)

In this context, Derrida’s seeming contradictions in his criticism of Eisenman’s work begin to make sense. It is also important to note the obsession with the concept and development of the model of “deconstructivist architecture” that was quickly spreading and becoming fashionable in architectural culture at this time. Jeffrey Kipnis argues that this marks a shift in Eisenman’s theoretical and design trajectory: “From then on, Derrida, once authority, then man, becomes an apparition, a specter of misdeed who haunts the architect.”\(^{182}\) So the relevance to Derrida’s work is clear, but what about Eisenman’s?

Derrida continues in the letter to raise additional questions, all related to the first. Derrida points out that he “will know all that you [Eisenman] will have said publicly.”\(^{183}\) In other words, what about the public reception, or even the discipline’s reception of Eisenman’s work? Derrida asks about “the sex appeal of the architectural forms” in Eisenman’s work, and as previously mentioned, the suppression of materiality does not

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\(^{180}\) Ibid., p. 110.


avoid this. And lastly, Derrida continues by asking why Eisenman never speaks about the direct relations between architecture and specific social and political situations.

Derrida’s letter did not go ignored and spurred immediate response from Eisenman and his followers (which will be addressed later in this research). Many argue that this suggests that Eisenman’s work needs to be more about the immediate physical site, the direct context. His design projects were always about their sites. The houses functioned in contrast to their Victorian residential settings and were strategically placed on their properties. The “cities of artificial excavation” projects were entirely derived from their direct sites and the sites’ larger contexts including their histories, even if those derivations were “fictitiously” constructed.

Derrida here suggests an argument that comes as a surprise due to the excess of fatigue and seeming futility that surfaces more and more as Eisenman’s work progresses, the struggle with the “new” condition of architecture. So to an extent, parts of Eisenman’s work—as well as several of his followers’ interpretations of his work—at this time can be interpreted as a struggle with Rorty’s description of the problem of implicating the negative as an only option. The discipline of architecture at this time as well was probably the only design-related discipline that turned to critiquing its interiority as a response to its political situation. While Eisenman’s particular response to this situation essentially took the form of one idea—and this idea is developed throughout his entire career—it was, however, necessary for Eisenman to address this situation—the dissolution of the architectural object in contemporary culture—and aspects of his response form the crux presented here. But Eisenman’s method should not be seen as “new” as one may be led to believe—just as Derrida’s “deconstructive method” was not new—and formed the basis of
architectural modernism before him. As Anthony Vidler points out, the various “inventions” of architectural modernism before Eisenman also reinterpreted the foundations of architecture to confront immediate political situations. As Vidler suggests, it has been part of the project of modernity since the late eighteenth century to seek questions that complicate and remain open-ended, avoiding the acceptance of the idea of an “end of history.” Eisenman’s endeavor to open up the formal language of architecture is continuous with this process. Thus, these attributes that present his work as “new,” as “only,” pretend to offer closure to unresolved questions—they offer the “fiction” of reason. Derrida’s point is that Eisenman’s professed lack of ideology is entirely ideological. As Derrida might put it, negativity has theological overtones. The “not classical” is in a sense the classical. Or, in other words—and this is due partly to inevitability and partly to the nature of the work itself—the work’s role as criticism—as more than visual—has been diluted to the point that it has, once again, fallen back entirely into the realm—the dissolution of conventional meaning—of the classical tradition.

4. The Fiction of History

The Blurring of Type-Forms in Eisenman’s Discourse and Design Projects in the 1990s
4.1 Eisenman’s Work in the Architectural Climate of the 1990s

By the 1990s, Eisenman’s methodological development of an internal critique of the discipline of architecture was being called into question. The architectural theorist Diane Ghirardo argues: “In a discussion centered on Giuseppe Terragni’s Casa del Fascio, Eisenman...dismissed any but formal considerations as thoroughly irrelevant. The divorce of architecture from the contamination of the real world has been a constant in Eisenman’s work.”\(^\text{185}\) The reduction of architecture to universal formal properties was becoming seen as unable to produce the sensibilities necessary to address the growing political concerns of architects in an increasingly globalized context, and the proliferation of models in the discourse—such as the “anti-architecture” architecture of “deconstruction”—was becoming seen as a “fascistic impulse,” counter to its original objectives.\(^\text{186}\) In other words, the privatization of the discipline—which could be seen as necessary in the 1960s—expanded into the public realm could be seen as a dangerous endeavor.\(^\text{187}\) After the turn of the century, several of Eisenman’s contemporaries would find themselves in difficult political situations repeating the mistakes of conflating style with politics—for example, Daniel Libeskind in New York, or Frank Gehry in Jerusalem (both heavily influenced by Eisenman’s work).\(^\text{188}\) While Eisenman’s work always addressed these concerns from the


1960s through the 1980s, it could be seen to have lost its effectiveness by this time, and issues arising from its reception could be seen to obscure its objectives. The question then becomes: how is the knowledge produced by Eisenman’s work in the prior decades—the continuation of or challenge to classical architectural precepts—going to address the growing concerns of architecture in the public realm without abandoning the level of criticism made possible by the level of independence in the prior work?

Frank Gehry’s work in Jerusalem, see Critical Inquiry, Spring 2010. For a critique of this problem among a broad range of contemporary architects (with particular attention to the appropriation of modern art practices in architectural practices), see Hal Foster, The Art-Architecture Complex, London: Verso, 2011, p. 1-129.
4.2 Rebstockpark Master Plan, Frankfurt, Germany, 1990-1992

Eisenman’s competition entry for a master plan for Rebstockpark in Germany is often cited as signifying a change in Eisenman’s design trajectory—for example, by a variety of authors in the book Re:Working Eisenman.189 Eisenman himself argues: “The Frankfurt project for Rebstockpark is something new. One does not have many breakthrough projects.”190 He suggests that this project moves away from his prior “archaeological work and superposition to the cusp of this folding work.”191 However, despite a perceived change in Eisenman’s theoretical influences at this time, one can argue that this project merely offers an expansion of his prior design trajectory of “decomposing” the classical building type, in this case the “Siedlung” building type, as well as the classical polarities of figure and ground, solid and void, etc.

Located on a site that is loaded with history—previously a vineyard, an airfield during World War II, and now a park surrounded by the Autobahn with some warehouses towards the south of it (Figure 41)—this design somewhat veers away from

Figure 41: Rebstockpark site. Source: Written Into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990-2004, p. 15.

191 Ibid.
Eisenman’s prior specific method as developed in the “cities of artificial excavation” projects in favor of a direct critical engagement with one of Germany's prominent building types. In reference to the German Siedlung development plan, which arose out of the formation of “grand boulevards and allees” in the mid-nineteenth century, Eisenman argues: “The object buildings seemed detached, floating on a ground that was no longer active.”

Eisenman is clear and direct here that this design is not about the “new,” it is not about replacing the “old,” but it is about reinterpreting the old so that potentials for new, or more relevant possibilities might emerge. Eisenman states: “Planning envelopes are volumes of Cartesian space which seem to be neutral...[but] these Platonic solids that contain the stylisms and images of...classical...space, are really nothing more than a condition of ideology taken for neutral or natural.”

Eisenman in this design is largely borrowing philosophical concepts that can at this time be seen to be rather newly adopted into his discourse, particularly the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the fold, as well as his concept of immanence. This change in philosophical influence, although it shares many aspects and continuities with Eisenman’s prior work, is often seen as influencing a more pragmatic approach—in this case referring to thought as a kind of action—as a method in Eisenman’s designs in the

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194 Deleuze describes the fold rather abstractly—although extensively—as dealing with relations across boundaries in The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. While Deleuze associates the concept with the baroque and mannerism—although showing some disdain for the latter term—rather than the classical, it can here be seen to allow Eisenman to maintain the disciplinary boundaries he links with classical architecture, while producing variation and complication within them.
1990s, contrasted with his more Derridean or inclusive approach in the 1980s. While the term immanence has previously occupied a substantial role in Eisenman's writings—for example, in Derrida's description of “immanent text,” or more broadly Eisenman’s emphasis on reinterpretation from within established architectural conventions or specific sites—here it more specifically refers to a mode of subjectivity that is not necessarily abstract or universal, nor grounded in “classical subject-object relations.” In a way, this definition of immanence views identity as fictitiously constructed from habits. As philosopher John Rachman states, “immanence is pure only when it is not immanent to a prior subject or object, mind or matter, only when, neither innate nor acquired, it is always yet ‘in the making.’” Thus, it suggests impersonal ways of constructing “encounter and new compositions,” shifting from representation toward experience. Deleuze states: “There is a big difference between the virtuals that define the immanence of the transcendental field and the possible forms that actualize them and transform them into something transcendent.” The term virtual here refers generally to that which is not concrete. Related to this concept is also Deleuze's concept of the fold of thought, which can largely be seen as the creation of the new without oppositional logics, intentionality, or origins and ends. It can be to an extent defined as largely being about interior and exterior relations, more specifically about the “doubling” of an exterior by an interior. Or in other words, the inside “condenses the past” to confront it with a future from “the outside: the

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197 Ibid., p. 13.
198 Ibid., p. 15-16.
199 Ibid., p. 32.
line that continues to link up random events in a mixture of chance and dependency” in order to “re-create it.” This concept can be seen to be rather continuous with Eisenman’s prior practices of estranging architectural conventions in search of new possibilities. While Deleuze is referring mostly to interior and exterior in relation to the self, forces, knowledge, the subject, etc., Eisenman in the Rebstockpark project is applying these concepts to architecture and urbanism, particularly conditions of “old and new, transport and arrival, commerce and housing,” playing off of the distinctions to form new conditions from them.


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In the design process for the master plan, one finds a series of divisions to the site in plan that are obscured by a series of a mathematically derived system of shifts, overlaps, and tilts in plan and elevation (Figure 42). The Siedlung building development type then follows the complex grid to produce unpredicted variations in which the exact building type never repeats itself (Figure 43). The building type still embodies classical formal characteristics—axiality, symmetry, etc.—but its reception as such is obscured by the series of transformations performed on it, and is only somewhat perceptible in plan. It still operates on an “object-figure-ground” relationship, but the clarity of that relationship is obscured by shifting planes, and the various penetrations of solid (building) into void (the space between the buildings) and vice versa (Figure 44). In addition, typical German housing types are blurred with typical German commercial building types, forming a “weakened version of their traditional urban syntax.”

While this project expands Eisenman’s work in the production of new possibilities from existing forms of architecture, the discourse surrounding the building on the concept of the “fold” can be viewed as the kind of dialectical engagement with his prior discourse on “presence and absence” that Eisenman attempts so hard to avoid. In other words, it can be viewed to replace rather than expand a prior discourse. Eisenman is careful however to argue for it as not original, and to suggest things like:

What is needed is the possibility of reading object-figure-ground from another frame of reference. This new reading might reveal other conditions which may have always been immanent or repressed in the urban fabric...In such a displacement, the new, rather than being understood as fundamentally different from the old, is seen instead as being merely slightly out focus in relation to what exists...One such displacement possibility can be found in the form of the fold.
Thus, Eisenman here is stressing this as a potential method, rather than imposing architecture’s only option as drawing from its “absence.” In another essay, Eisenman states:

The fold is a different kind of symbol; it is no longer about image or iconic representation, but rather about index and mapping its own being, a mapping of its thisness in time as an event or a spectacle. As the sublime was to the time of the classical, so too is the spectacle to the time of the fold.204

It is clear that Eisenman here is continuing to explore possibilities for architecture in an increasingly mediated culture. But this can be read as continuous with Eisenman’s prior tendencies to introduce a concept to take the place of image in architecture, which is often reduced to triviality in its reception. In addition, the reception of this “authorless” process—the computer-generated formal modifications to the site that could be received as the physical process of folding—detached from its critique of the building type and conventional architectural relationship distinctions could be received as a “new” stylistic device within the discipline. In other words, to what ends is this method of the fold introduced here to be used? It should not be seen as a method for merely achieving increased complexity or blurring distinctions without reason, but should rather be seen as a method that produces potentials within the connectivity of these distinctions. As philosopher James Williams asks:

If an openness to innovation, change and indetermination is to condition creative acts, will they not become endlessly destructive? Is Deleuze forced into an ethics of annihilation, where objective, scientifically determined worlds, and ideal passionately determined worlds are plunged into chaos for the sake of some meaningless virtual world?205

204 Peter Eisenman, “Folding in Time: The Singularity of Rebstock,” ibid., p. 32.
It is clear that this is not intended by Eisenman. For example, he later states: “I was struck...by the pervasive influence of a new, perhaps more virulent breed of formalism...posed under the banner of a neo-avant-garde determinism.” This is not to say that the design itself—as well as many aspects of its surrounding discourse—did not open up new possibilities. As John Rajchman argues, “The fold is more than a technical device: it is the central Idea or Question of the project.” This refers to the fold as a method of opening what Eisenman sees as the irrelevant conventional distinctions—of for example, the use of figure-ground—to create “its own space and time.” As only a technical device it offers little, but as a method it suggests a use in Eisenman’s endeavor to proclaim “the end of the beginning” and “the end of the end.” As James Williams argues, this design is not about the “endlessly destructive,” but Eisenman here “goes from problems—which would seem to ask for solutions—to a problematisation, which involves the realization that certain problems cannot be resolved once and for all—they must become part of the creative process.” To Williams, in this project this is “through a combination of the ideas of figure and ground as processes of becoming rather than fixed limits.”

In addition, it expands Eisenman’s prior design trajectory without entirely replacing it, or entirely replacing the classical with a “ground zero.” For example, it expands the reevaluation of the universal cube object of the early house projects, or the role of history

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208 Ibid., p. 16.
210 Ibid., p. 213.
and indeterminacy in the designs of the “cities of artificial excavation” projects to a site-specific building type. But most importantly—despite the few continuations of prior classical tendencies—it has opened up possibilities that challenge the assertions that Eisenman’s formal critique stands no chance of retaining political relevance—that “immanence is the formal’s potential critical, and therefore political content”—in the broader realm of building practice.\(^{211}\)

4.3 The Proposal of a Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany, 1988-1997

Eisenman’s work for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin can be considered one of Eisenman’s most interesting projects due to the level of political ideology loaded in the conception of the project, the high level of controversy and debate surrounding the conception and development of the project itself, and the presence that the project has in mediated communication and everyday German life. In fact, Holocaust representation itself is a delicate and heavily debated topic in contemporary discourse and memorial planning. The project has somewhat of a history before Eisenman’s involvement in it, and the inconspicuous nature of Eisenman’s involvement raises some points about the concept of the “authorless” that are not as boldly clear in his prior work.

The idea for the memorial was originally proposed in 1988 by a citizens’ group led by Lea Rosh, a talk-show personality, and Eberhard Jackel, a World War II historian, for a site that formerly housed the Gestapo headquarters. The idea spurred immediate controversy in media attention as well as public debate. The group attempted to involve the government in the project from the start, published several newspaper articles proposing its development in 1989, and began to gain the support of the federal and city governments after the fall of the Berlin wall. The government soon moved the site to a heavily desired piece of real estate about the size of two football fields adjacent to the Berlin wall and close to Hitler’s bunker. A year after dedicating the Neue Wache—a neoclassical building to be used as a memorial to all of the victims of the war—the government began an open international competition for the design of the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” in 1994. The competition—judged by a jury of fifteen
intellectuals and experts—received 528 design proposals, and in 1995, two designs were selected, one from Berlin architect Christine Jackob-Marks, and one from New York artist Simon Ungers. Jackob-Marks’s design was to be constructed with possible modifications appropriated from Ungers’s design. However Jackob-Marks's design of a twenty-three foot thick concrete “gravestone” loaded with direct symbolism applied as engravings and choices of numbers was ultimately rejected by Chancellor of Germany Helmut Kohl as “too big and undignified.”

All 528 designs however were made public and the idea of proposing the memorial—from the choice of site to the selected proposals—continued to occupy debates in the content of journal articles.

In 1997, the memorial's organizers aimed to break ground for the memorial by the turn of the century despite the objections presented by experts in several colloquia held on the topic. Issues included the problems of a central memorial drawing attention away from scattered memorials already in existence, as well as the possibility of a central memorial suggesting the offering of closure to a burden. In the same year, another competition was held to invite the nine finalists from the prior competition in addition to several other architects and artists to submit new proposals for the memorial. Considering the government’s choice of individuals to be included in the project, competition juror James Young argues, “so mistrustful were the Germans of their own judgment that they could not assign such responsibility—at either the artistic or evaluative level—to themselves alone.”

Eisenman was one of several individuals chosen to participate possibly because of his seeming ideological neutrality in the matter, according to Young. Eisenman’s work

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213 Ibid., p. 208.
would seem appropriate as it always had a certain engagement with history, memory, authority, etc. By the end of the year, a jury of five experts selected two proposals, one by Gesine Weinmiller and one by Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra, and within the next few months, consensus was formed around the Eisenman-Serra proposal.
4.4 The Design and Development of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Germany, 1997-2005

On the initial design of the memorial, Eisenman collaborated with the artist Richard Serra—well known for his sculptures that challenge art as image-production in favor of establishing experiential content, engagement with construction, and dialogue with surrounding environments—to design a sunken landscape gridded with rows of concrete pillars. Serra as well had already been known for his use of “weight and measure” in commemorative sculpture. For example, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1992) presents a low bridge-like structure to mutually combine “the saved” or those who cross the bridge and the “drowned” or those denied passage (Figure 45). *Gravity* (1993) presents a heavy steel vertical slab on a stair in the Holocaust Memorial Museum to ambiguously reconcile descent with ascent, as well as gravity with grace (Figure 46). As Hal Foster states: “Like the Holocaust, both exist in our space-time—in history, not beyond it.”²¹⁴ Foster continues:

> Is this refusal of representation vis-à-vis the Holocaust a sign of impossibility, of melancholic fixation on a traumatic past, or is it a sign of possibility, of a mournful working-through of this past that is also a holding-open to a different future? In either case the Shoah is commemorated, but not raised to the oppressive status of a religion of its own.²¹⁵

This ambiguity of weight can also be seen in Eisenman’s schematic proposal for the *Monument and Memorial Site Dedicated to the Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime in Austria, 1938-1945* (1995-1996) in Austria, in which a series of tilted vertical slabs fold and unfold along the site, formed by a method that attempts to challenge “the premises of the two poles of Western thought, reason and expression” by developing the forms out of rescaled

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²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 158.
historical maps of Germany and Austria (Figure 47). Serra dropped from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe project immediately after the organizers requested a decrease in the quantity and height of the pillars due a potential danger of hiding visitors from view—originally proposed at a quantity of over four thousand, varying in height to over sixteen feet high. The commissioners desired “more humanly proportioned forms” as to be less threatening to visitors, and also to help justify the design to the increasingly skeptical public. The removal of pillars also allowed for programmatic events such as commemorative activities to occur.


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216 Peter Eisenman, “Memorial Site Dedicated to the Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime in Austria, 1938-1945,” in Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman Complete Works, p. 241.
Eisenman’s modified design avoids attempting to offer direct symbolic meaning (such as the symbolic number of pillars in Daniel Libeskind’s neighboring Jewish Museum) and includes 2,711 pillars—“303 steles more than four meters high, 569 steles from three to four meters high, 491 steles from two to three meters high, 869 steles from one to two meters high, 367 steles from zero to one meter high—and…112 flat platforms without steles.”

Although it is difficult to perceive, according to Eisenman the grid is based on the context of Berlin, and follows an adherence to an east-west orientation (Figure 48). Each pillar is a little less than a meter wide and 2.375 meters long, spaced just wide enough to allow one individual to pass through the grid. Eisenman states:

The traditional monument is understood by its symbolic imagery, by what it represents. It is not understood in time, but in an instant of space...In this monument there is no goal, no end, no working one's way in or out. The duration of...

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an individual’s experience of it grants no further understanding, since no understanding is possible.219

As Eisenman argues, the design responds to the idea that any attempt to represent the Holocaust is “inadequate” and thus “memory” here takes the place of “nostalgia,” or “the past remains active in the present.”220 In addition, the pillars slightly slope in different directions depending on the slope of the land beneath, creating a more disorienting than stable experience (Figure 49).

Figures 48-49: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe site plan and perspective photograph. Source: University of Minnesota Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman Complete Works, p. 293.

220 Ibid.
Eisenman incorporated several other of the commissioners’ concerns in modifying the design, for example, the inclusion of trees on the perimeter, a bus stop, tablets with written historical text, and gravel walkways to inhibit running. In addition, a few weeks before national elections in 1998, Michael Naumann—Social Democratic Party leader’s culture minister-designate—would demand the incorporation of pedagogical—meaning offering direct historical information—content in the memorial. Eisenman incorporated Naumann’s concern into the design in a proposal in 1999 with a series of additions to the memorial, and Naumann’s pedagogical content would ultimately be incorporated as an information center underground below the initial proposal. It would be approved by parliament in June of that year, despite the continuation of several presentations against the memorial. However, it is clear that while Eisenman incorporated these modifications, it was not entirely in his interest, stating: “As an architect…you win some and you lose some.”221 The information center was designed by exhibition designer Dagmar von Wilcken and presented in a symposium in 2001 that did not result in a consensus, but gained attention in newspapers in 2002. The same year, construction began and was opened to the public in 2005, and its construction continued to occupy debates—some as direct as questioning the concrete coating company’s prior involvement with producing Zyklon B for gas chambers.222 This still leaves the questions: what does any of this have to do with Eisenman’s design for the memorial, and what does this particular design have to do with Eisenman’s engagement with classical architecture? In order to consider these questions, it is necessary to address some of the particular criticisms of Eisenman’s design.

221 Danto, p. 44.
4.5 Criticisms of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

It is interesting that several critics dwell on Eisenman’s statement that “Memory is not the same as history.” While presenting valid analyses of the project, it will be argued that several criticisms are reductive in their conclusions to define the memorial in purely oppositional terms. And the attention to the statement above on memory recalls Derrida’s criticism of Eisenman’s negativity as theological. Literary theorist Karyn Ball confronts this relation by arguing that “Eisenman’s minimalist allegiance to the image prohibition” results in an eclipse of “historical consciousness.” Ball points out that Eisenman’s “antimemorial genre” of “minimalist abstraction” belongs to “the commercial genre of art and architecture texts featuring highly aestheticized images of important buildings by important architects—that is to say, a genre geared toward unhampered fetishistic consumption.” Ball continues to argue that Eisenman was chosen for the project because his work “appeals to a conventional mimetic longing to find a properly ‘Jewish’ form to correspond to respectful identification with the murdered Jews,” and he uses Eisenman’s prior correspondence with Derrida—particularly Derrida’s critique of the relation of “absence” to determinacy—to support this argument. In addition, she argues that the project produces “sublime” conditions of experience that sustain the viewer’s failure to comprehend and understand the extent of the Holocaust.

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223 Ibid., p. 40.
225 Ibid., p. 66.
226 Ibid., p. 70-72.
227 Ibid., p. 84. Ball is more specificaly referring to philosophers Theodor Adorno’s and Immanuel Kant’s descriptions of the negative and dynamic sublime. In the former’s
attributes can result in the eclipse of pedagogical understanding in favor of aesthetic experience, even if it functions in the negative.

Ball is not the only critic to interpret the project as contradictory when interpreted as merely oppositional. Literary theorist Richard Crownshaw argues that the “countermonument” that associates “monumentality and fascism” only moves from the “representation of fascism’ to the ‘fascism of representation.”” Crownshaw argues that recent claims to challenge the totality of “History” with the concept of memory “has eclipsed history altogether” and gained a “new-found authority.” Crownshaw states:

the theorization of such architecture tends to isolate the architecture itself from a wider historical context. In other words, the architecture itself is a reflection or materialization of the dynamics of memory, whilst its conception, inception and reception are a matter of history.

Crownshaw argues that the problem with the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” along with several other “countermonuments” is that they form a “binary opposition between the monument and the countermonument.” The opposition lies in the universal equation of monumentality and fascism, in addition to opposing memory with history, conflating loss with absence. Like Ball’s argument, Crownshaw presents a valid claim about the universalizing tendencies of complete opposition to monuments. Both of these arguments should be challenged: can this project be considered to repeat the oppositional description of the “negative sublime...an unsettling failure is not redeemed by...reason...[and the] reality of domination and suffering is cheapened rather than illuminated by plots that end in consolation.” In the latter’s description, “the mathematical sublime [is linked] with the cognitive agitation arising from the judgment of an object, while the dynamic sublime refers this agitation to the power of desire.”

229 Ibid.
230 Ibid., p. 213.
231 Ibid., p. 214.
logic of Eisenman's work in the 1980s? What makes it “antimemorial,” “coutermonumental,” or “sublime”?

Art critic Arthur Danto—who expresses some affinity towards the claim that the memorial has a tendency to eclipse history through the memory-history dichotomy—offers a somewhat different interpretation of the memorial. Similar to Ball's interpretation, Danto compares the memorial to a kind of subjective beauty detached from representation and context.\(^{232}\) In a citation of Eisenman, Danto writes: “I think it's a little too aesthetic. It's a little too good-looking. It's not that I wanted something bad-looking, but I didn’t want it to seem designed. I wanted the ordinary, the banal.”\(^{233}\) In addition, like several other critics, Danto points out the common association of the memorial with a graveyard, which in fact can be considered a flaw in the design. But he also suggests that it is also associated with a “funhouse or playground.”\(^{234}\) He states:

> nobody pauses to interpret the undulations, or to ask why the gravestones should undulate. So what do they do instead? They walk back and forth, talking on their cell phones. Or they photograph one another over the tops of the steles. Girls shriek with laughter and wave to one another...Someone laid two yellow roses on top of a stele, someone else a basket with two plants. Some people place a single stone atop a stele. But boys still jump from stele to stele.\(^{235}\)

While this challenges Ball’s association of the memorial with the problem of detachment and history, Danto argues that the complete lack of determined interpretation causes a problem with remembering history.

So far, a contradiction emerges in these criticisms, particularly the first two. In the trouble oscillating between the binary oppositions—memorial/antimemorial,

\(^{232}\) Danto, p. 42.
\(^{233}\) Ibid.
\(^{234}\) Ibid., p. 43.
\(^{235}\) Ibid., p. 44.
beautiful/sublime, fascist/nonfascist—the authors did not question why the memorial should fit so neatly into a certain category they selected. Most critics acknowledge Michael Naumann’s objection to Eisenman’s original design, which it was observed were comparable to Albert Speer’s building plans in its monumentality. However, they do not seem to question why such monumentality or representation can be interpreted with such seeming clarity in what they criticize as anti-monumental and anti-representational form. On the other hand, there are several critics that acknowledge the anxiety of addressing these oppositions.

For example, literary theorist Brett Ashley Kaplan referring to Young’s involvement in the project states: “Young’s position changed from the Lyotardian anti-representational form, in which closure supposedly encourages forgetting, to the pro-representational form, in which the visibility of Holocaust imagery creates meaning and therefore opens up a space for memory.”236 Kaplan pinpoints this condition as fear of “aesthetic pollution” in memorial design. She suggests that Eisenman in this design is “unafraid to explore these strange contradictions,” for example, the coexistence of “pain and pleasure, forgetting and remembering, nostalgia and horror.”237 And perhaps it is here—whether intentionally or not—that Eisenman uses his prior concept of the fold to ambiguously combine typically opposites in an effort to influence the continuation of the proliferation of new possibilities without the excessive formalism of the prior work. In other words, here it refers to the folding of architectural forms typically defined by prior associations to allow for something else to be conceived. Quoting Cynthia Davidson in relation to the issue with the concrete

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237 Ibid., p. 171.
coating supplier, Kaplan writes: “Peter [Eisenman] argued that to forgive does not mean to forget, and he and those who agreed with him ‘won’ the debate.” And like in several of Eisenman’s other descriptions of projects, this attitude is obscured by one-liners like “memory is not the same as history” that are often received as presenting oppositional terms. Interestingly, Kaplan relates the “fear” produced “in order to induce a visceral understanding in the viewer” in this project to Eisenman’s office projects in the 1990s, in which “imminent destruction functions as a metaphor for the dislocation of place that characterizes postmodern business practices, which decentralize workers to such an extent that most interactions can happen via cyberspace rather than geographical space” (Figures 50-51). She argues that this allows Eisenman to use aesthetic forms that “cannot be attached to single political histories.” Thus, the design accommodates others’ fears of the “aesthetic pollution” of direct Holocaust representation that in a way challenges the complete rejection of history.

In addition to Kaplan, architectural historian Esther da Costa Meyer argues that Eisenman’s design here rejects the “literal speech of architecture parlante” or figurative architecture, “which leaves the viewer little freedom.” Thus Meyer distances Eisenman’s work here from the direct symbolism used by Eisenman’s contemporaries that Ball and Crownshaw compare the memorial to, and argues that this initiates the possibility of independent thinking. She points out: “Irreducible to any single meaning, Eisenman’s lieu de memoire nonetheless speaks to the German, Jewish, and German-Jewish contexts in a language that is neither familiar nor entirely foreign...and the injunction to remember is

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238 Ibid., p. 158.
239 Ibid., p. 159.
240 Ibid., p. 160.
left the responsibility of each individual spectator.”242 This is one way that the memorial functions as open-ended rather than offering closure. But there is more to this.


To return to the question of the classical in this project, the irresolution of and Oscillation between categorizations of the project can be seen to be partly a result of the use of classical type forms that is present in Eisenman’s other projects as well. As Sarah Whiting describes the Aronoff Center, it blurs the distinction between the monumental and non-monumental. This can be seen in the struggle for example of Naumann to describe it as “Speer-like” and Crownshaw to describe it as anti-monumental. It is in fact the reference to classical objects that is causing the alarm among the critics. This is not to say that Eisenman is attempting to accommodate both, but rather he was challenging assumptions. The project is precisely the classical colonnade, spaced evenly, oriented with precision, and

242 Ibid.
repeated to excess. The even spacing and orientation is not easily seen due to the slight tilting of each pillar and varying ground slope and elevation. The pillars’ heights are shortened, and their lengths elongated. They are flipped upside down so they are now “holding up” the ground, and terminating at the same point in the air (Figure 52). The framing of “man” is obscured by the same width of solid and void as well as the lack of a directly perceived center. But there is more to this than most of Eisenman’s other projects.

In a criticism of Eisenman’s early house projects, architectural theorist Stan Allen asks why the concept of the index has been excluded to a coherent process of design. Allen argues that "Eisenman, by insisting on the language-like character of the indexical sign, seem[s] to miss precisely what is most interesting about the index, which is that it totally bypasses codified language systems."\textsuperscript{243} To Allen, the index should link physical artifacts with virtual meanings, not through representation. Allen points out the most attractive potential of the index, namely that it suggests the unfolding of life through use: "Its origin is the moment when design is complete, the building is occupied, and the architect no

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longer in control. This is a process that design and construction can only initiate, or steer
in a very general way. It is a process that unfolds in a complex interaction with the messy
and unpredictable forces of life itself. Less narrative, less history; more atmosphere, more
effect."244 This process "unfolds" in a number of ways here, but before analyzing how this
operates in the memorial project—and as something that "bypasses codified language
systems," it is impossible to account for all of the ways—it will be useful to acknowledge art
historian Maike Mugge’s description of the memorial as symbolic political representation.

As Mugge states, the memorial as "a structure within the public sphere, its form,
space, material, colour and its dedication make statements regarding the initiators' claim to
provide a message to society."245 And of course, this is inevitable as a central memorial.
But she points to the fact that its difference from the surrounding city and reception in
mass media "interrupts the routine of everyday life."246 For example, the memorial has
become an established venue for use in political speech as a combination of "material and
communication."247 And as described above, the concept of the memorial has been a
central object of debate long before Eisenman’s involvement. Mugge argues that what is
referred to as the distinction between the "imagined unreal" and the "imagined real"—or
the idea of the memorial and the actual proposal—is challenged by the undefined nature of
the proposal. She describes this as revealing “a shrinking impact of the built object.”248

244 Ibid., p. 64.
245 Maike Mugge, “Politics, Space, and Material: The ‘Memorial to the Murdered Jews of
Europe’ in Berlin as a Sign of Symbolic Representation,” European Review of History,
246 Ibid.
247 Ibid., p. 709.
248 Ibid., p. 722.
This then raises the question: what does Ball exactly mean by Eisenman’s ban on image? The nature of the project itself suggests its use as image: as a “central” memorial, as its inevitable use to support political ideologies, as its commissioning of brand name architects and artists, and even as its “imagined unreal.” The result is that it becomes part of a representation of the city, a “sign of political representation” in mass media, part of the glossy representations of art and architectural publications, and represented as an idea. But as Mugge points out, it never remains constant, even after its construction. It is also interesting to note that its representations are never really attractive, nor do they encompass much of the project. Its plan is just a grid, aerial views just a texture (Figure 53), and perspectival photographs only partial. It does not offer a single view, and in fact its pillars are sunken below eye level obscuring their traditional role in the object-figure-
ground distinction, thus contributing to an estranged and subtle—but not absent—presence in media representation.

This role as representation also questions Ball’s association of the memorial with the sublime as well as Danto’s reliance on disinterested pleasure (and perhaps Danto’s argument can be challenged by the idea that it is up to the spectator to choose how to interact with it, as argued by Meyer). In other words, this distinction between beauty and the sublime seems to not be so clear in this project. To an extent, these ambiguities can be seen to allow the memorial—as both a physical object and as a concept—to continue to develop an undetermined life through the debates that continue around it, its resistance to a resolution of meaning; and perhaps most importantly its inclusion in daily life and mediated communication fosters the proliferation of these conditions. This can be considered one of the ultimate aims generated by the late avant-garde—the existence of irresolution within resolution. And while one can argue that these instances might exist without Eisenman’s specific design for the memorial, the lack of determinacy in the memorial design only contributes to this, rather than eclipsing it.

However, this still leaves the question of authorship that Eisenman’s “cities of artificial excavation” projects do not seem to fully address. Or in Benjamin Buchloh’s terms, how is the demolition of authorship to exist along with the production of brand names? While the Aronoff Center commission required a signature building, the signature is not so clear here. In fact, one can identify that both Eisenman and Serra had a role in the design, but one cannot identify exactly what each role was. As architectural theorist Luis Fernandez-Galiano points out: “In the beginning, this blurred monument was a rather recognizable combination of the heavy materiality of Richard Serra and the geometric
complexities of Peter Eisenman. But as time wore on, the same form started acquiring a life of its own and the traces of its makers became fainter.\textsuperscript{249} In the novel \textit{The Catastrophist}, legal theorist Lawrence Douglas describes a fictional character who loses the trust of the public after lying about being the child of Holocaust survivors during his involvement in the commissioning of a Holocaust memorial in Berlin.\textsuperscript{250} This is not really present here and Eisenman and Serra never really emerge as prominent figures in the development of the memorial. Serra left the project early on, and Eisenman stayed on it for eight years. But as Fernandez-Galiano suggests, as the project becomes constructed, Eisenman fades out of it, and it retains merely a relation to the Holocaust, at least to the historian—\textquotedblleft the sagging grid expresses the perverse rationality...the undulating shapes evoke...open fields and war cemeteries.\textsuperscript{251}

To briefly return to Mugge's argument, the material of the pillars also acquires a life, and it is important to ask why Eisenman and Serra chose concrete for the pillars as they did. Mugge points out that only "three years after the official opening [of the

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure54.png}
\caption{Block with crack. Source: Mugge, p. 720}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{251} Fernandez-Galiano, p. 333.
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memorial], more than half the blocks are cracked” (Figure 54). In addition, the fact that the concrete was already cracking occupied national television and printed news in 2007. On the one hand, one can argue that the cracks resulted from the German construction industry’s lack of familiarity with self-compacting concrete. On the other, one can argue that Eisenman as an architect and Serra as a sculpture with experience in construction know that concrete at the size of those pillars is inevitably going to crack, and it can be argued that Eisenman intentionally omitted control joints from the surface of the pillars. While in many of Eisenman’s previous projects, the suppression of materiality results in uninhabitable spaces (one of Eisenman’s professed preconditions for architecture), here the intentional engagement with materiality offers no actual inhibition to habitability—or cracks in the concrete produce no actual danger to visitors. This is interesting for several reasons. First, as Mugge points out, the “cracks expose the processual quality on the memorial’s surface and make time visible.” In addition, the varying weights of pillars on weak foundations allow each pillar to gradually sink at different angles and speeds influencing an incomplete or imperfect composition. Second, Mugge argues that while it occupies media attention, it has had no effect on the memorial’s use for symbolic political representation, suggesting dissolution of the actual object. And third, as Mugge states, “concrete was used in memorials and architecture in the 1920s and 1930s with the connotation of political, technological, social and artistic progress.” Thus, a “permanent” material here is used in way that does not offer a consistent or complete image.

252 Mugge, p. 720.
253 Ibid., p. 722.
254 Ibid., p. 721.
What does this have to do with Eisenman’s attempt to move away from the classical tradition? As mentioned above, it is the classical object in its formal properties, but its reception as such is obscured by estrangement (Figure 55). While the classical object offers permanence, or closure, no resolution is offered here, nor are past architectural forms rejected in the forms of the memorial. This leads to the unfolding of the memorial’s life through use, brought about by the lack of authorship, the estrangement of classical rules, and the impermanence of materiality. The lack of authorship here influences the continuation of the proliferation of debates surrounding the concept of the memorial itself, in which there never seems to be any consensus from critics and spectators about what the actual object is or means. The estrangement of classical rules contributes to this as well, in addition to maintaining a certain relation to history and allowing an indeterminate future to unravel over time. The impermanence of materiality influences a challenge to the completeness of the image. The concrete gradually—or rather rapidly—cracks, challenging the permanence of the dominant humanist image of the traditional classical object, and the pavers on the ground trace varying human footsteps rather than the void or traces of physical contact. The result is that the object itself gradually disappears from the

Figure 55: The ambiguity of classical and non-classical characteristics in the colonnade of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Illustration by author.
foreground of anything, and becomes a backdrop for an engagement with Holocaust remembrance in everything from political speeches to everyday life. But it is only through a direct engagement with classical type forms, that Eisenman is able to actually move away from the traditional “fictions” of the classical architectural object.
5. Conclusion
So far, this thesis has established that Eisenman’s design trajectories beginning with his early house experiments are both consciously and unconsciously premised and dependent on a reinterpretation of the constructions of the classical tradition in architecture. Through the use of classical rules of representation in the design processes, the early houses sought to free those forms of representation from the realm of the merely visual in order to encourage a practice of reading that promotes the spectator’s understanding. And as Eisenman retrospectively points out, Houses I through IV ultimately contributed to the grounding of the metaphysic of architecture through the search for essence and autonomy. The result is that this search for truth affirmed the institution and risked the loss of values he attributes to classical and modern architecture. Eisenman then proposed a shift towards designs that foster unforeseen readings, and this method of design can be observed in the “cities of artificial excavation” projects. In these projects, Eisenman attempted to negate the use of classical type forms as well as originality without completely dismissing the search for objectivity in design, a search that is inevitably a classical one. While in their forms, these projects exhibited little relation to classical architecture, they continued a desire for establishing tried and true methods, and their reception as “new” or “only” once again influenced their claims for fiction as truth, contradicting Eisenman’s cathartic purging of a recourse to the classical. In the Aronoff Center for Design and Art, Eisenman employed a design intended to influence unforeseen readings similar to the “cities of artificial excavation,” although applied classical type forms in unconventional ways in an attempt to dissolve their hierarchy in architectural design. His competition entry for the Rebstockpark Master Plan introduced a method of reinterpreting classical distinctions such as figure and ground in an attempt to produce
more relevant and unforeseen possibilities from the overlapping of those dichotomies. In addition, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe continued to blur those distinctions in an effort to resist closure by allowing ambiguities to emerge between them.

The paradox that emerges in all of these designs is that Eisenman’s endeavor to move away from the fictions of classical architecture necessarily required a cynical repetition of the use of those fictions. However, underlying those forms, design processes, and theoretical trajectories is an unconscious classical desire for objectivity, for truth, and thus for authority. As K. Michael Hays implies, the project of the late avant-garde was necessarily authoritative, necessarily elitist, and it is no wonder why these works understood as self-reflexive criticism would eventually come under attack for emphasizing these attributes. Eisenman’s work was always contradictory in its dependence on the institution, on symbolic capital, on its object status. And as Hays also points out, there is largely a response in the work to architecture’s lost object—and this desire can alone be directly observed in the excess of glossy photographs and work-intensive drawings and models in the works’ presentations. In addition, one can argue that the work is caught up in a conflict between a nonchalant pragmatism and an authoritative canon formation, an act of rupturing old conventions and a mirroring imposition of new conventions, etc. However, a problem emerges when these projects are received to propose an end condition, as what Eisenman may refer to as prototypical, or even to be used as pastiche. In the earlier work, Eisenman’s proposition of neutrality, of avoiding ideological constructions through their negation, was ultimately an ideological endeavor. And as Hays points out, it was intended to leave unasuaged possibilities for architecture to come. It was, to Hays, a critical reflection on the limits of modernity, and to Anthony Vidler, part of the project of
modernity itself. But the question that remains is one of praxis: what has prevented or restricted what Hays refers to as the “imaginary solutions” of these projects to envision architecture’s role in a more socialist future from becoming substantial controlling forces in culture?

We now know that Eisenman’s desire for the birth of the reader was an illusion, that his idea of anti-functionalism has been absorbed by the bourgeois class or in other words his negative relation to the market can become capital, his expectations from architectural culture would not exceed the conditions of broader realms of culture and his forms of institutional critique is now a style, his reliance on philosophical concepts would be aestheticized, etc. On the one hand, from the paradox described above, one can argue that Eisenman has already contradictorily incorporated these inevitabilities into his work—for example, in his antithetical claim to “dislocate” while simultaneously positing truths. On the other hand, these “truths” can be seen to often obscure the reception of valid criticism in the work, and influence its reduction to Eisenman’s characterization of the loss of meaning in classical architecture. In addition, these impositions, or generalizations—perhaps even exaggerations—of architecture’s overall condition in culture, the necessity of its autonomy, could be seen to influence a reactionary trend towards realism in architectural culture. But interestingly, Hays points out that these works were always about the real, about architecture’s real social situation. However, it still leaves the question of why they are so often reduced to an end condition—as Vidler attributes to postmodernism and Eisenman attributes to recent “neo-avant-garde determinism”—rather than continuing to be opened up to new possibilities. And of course, there are several reasons for this that are probably well known by now: the use of an idiosyncratic language,
the movement’s resistance to offering a way out, etc. But it still leaves the problem of the
work’s reduction. In a criticism of contemporary stylistic practices in architecture, Hal
Foster asks: “why, in any case, would one want to advocate an architecture that further
privatizes the subject and occludes the social?”255 Foster continues:

At stake here are not mere preferences in design but important implications for
subjectivity and society alike. Perhaps the rationalist subjectivity assumed by literal
transparency—a subject invited to understand space, to critique architecture, to
defetishize art and culture—is a fantasy of its own, another myth of Enlightenment
in need of demystification. Yet what are the alternatives advanced in recent
architecture? Pastiche postmodernism a la Venturi positioned the subject as the
master of architectural history, able to cite its styles at will, even as it also allowed
presented this subject with amnesiac simulacra. Conversely, deconstructivist
postmodernism a la Eisenman positioned the subject as the object of architectural
language, even as it also allowed the subject a delusory degree of agency in its
manipulations.256

To Foster, the problem remains that the subject is “suspended in a difficult moment
between knowledge and blockage...[and much mainstream contemporary architecture]
tends to reinforce a subjectivity and society given over to a fetishism of image and
information.”257 Thus, one can see the relevance of Eisenman’s endeavor to open up the
formal language of architecture to promote a subjective understanding of space. And while
the removal of this architecture from direct social missions could be seen as a valuable
moment in the 1960s, by the 1990s it could be seen to further privatize, and thus fetishize
the work under consideration here.

However, a significant expansion of Eisenman’s endeavor—what can be described
as a shift towards semi-autonomy—can be seen to emerge in his work in the 1990s. While
Eisenman’s development of the fold in architecture would often be received as a

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256 Ibid., p. 128-129.
257 Ibid., p. 129.
meaningless formal device, the concept itself allowed for not only an undoing of the classical hierarchies, but also a method to derive new design possibilities. And considering critics’ anxious fluctuations in attempts to familiarly categorize the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe project, it is difficult to believe that this design offers any concise form of closure. And while one can argue that it is a rare commission, one can also argue that the methods employed in the design can be relevant in a variety of other architectural commissions. But once again, what does this have to do with the use or negation of classical type forms and fictions in Eisenman’s work?

It is the position of this thesis that Eisenman’s focus on the fictions of classical architecture was a continuation of the revolutionary intentions of the Modern Movement. On the one hand, Eisenman’s work can be seen to destabilize what Kurt Forster refers to as the “classicizing stability lurking in the matrix of modern architecture.” On the other, it can be seen as an avoidance of that stability in favor of an expressionism characteristic of the work of several contemporaries. Thus, to acknowledge the revolutionary intentions of the work requires an understanding that it was always contradictory, and its significance is in its contradictions: that the trivial forms in the work derive from classical hierarchies as attempts to rid their fictional ubiquity from modern architecture, that the positing of truths derives from a fear of the loss of objectivity in design, and so on. But when the attributes of these works are seen as models, as prototypes, or as sources of pastiche detached from their self-criticism—their paradoxical nature—the revolutionary intentions eclipse into the works’ own death, and in Foster’s terms, the subject is further privatized, and the social further occluded. Eisenman’s overall project can be seen as merely asking the question: what is possible in architecture without the traditional constraints of the fictional
constructions of classical and modern architecture? But the aim of the earlier work can largely be seen as merely attempting to dissolve these fictional constructions. The later work helped Eisenman to develop ways of opening his work to new possibilities. Yet at the same time, it seems as though Eisenman understands that the complete negation of the classical, the dialectical emphasis on the anti-classical, is ultimately a classical endeavor in itself. He also understands that his contributions would be absorbed as “new,” and “only,” deprived of their meaning. In the end, it is through the estrangement, the reinterpretation, the blurring, the reuse of classical constructions, that Eisenman moves away from the obsolescence, the failed social promises, while confirming the role of the classical fictions in an antithetical use in his own modern architecture.
Works Cited


