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Cities of Artificial Excavation

The Work of Peter Eisenman, 1978–1988

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Introduction

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BÉDARD

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

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

Of the eleven projects which constitute the Cities of Artificial Excavation, the Canadian Centre for Architecture has selected for this publication four of the most representative and best documented examples, all part of its collection. The dense sequence of conceptual sketches, models, and notes created for the submission to the International Seminar of Design for Cannaregio West, Venice (1978); for the submission to the Restricted International Competition "South Friedrichstadt as a Place to Live and Work," of the Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin (1980–1981, partially realized between 1982 and 1986); for the University Art Museum of the California State University at Long Beach, California (unbuilt design, 1986); and for "Choral Works," a garden for the Parc de la Villette, Paris (unbuilt design, 1985–1986) – uncover the most important ideas Eisenman explored during this decade.²

The Cannaregio project introduces Eisenman's reflections on the idea of site. He uses as points of departure for this project Le Corbusier's 1964–1965 design for a hospital in Venice and one of his own projects, House 11a. As he explores the Venetian site with the help of topological geometry, he develops

1. Eisenman first used this phrase as the title of his presentation text for the entry to the competition "South Friedrichstadt as a Place to Live and Work." Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1984. This text is included in this volume at the beginning of the catalogue section for the Berlin project. Kurt W. Forster first gave the concept of artificial excavation a theoretical articulation in "Eisenman/Robertson's *City of Artificial Excavation*," *Archetype 2* (spring 1984): 107–121, which is reprinted here, with a December 1992 postscript. The special August 1988 issue of *Architecture and Urbanism* entitled *Peter Eisenman/EISEN-MANAMNESIE* is entirely devoted to the Cities of Artificial Excavation.

2. See the chronology for a complete list of the projects in this series.

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

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

From Composition to Decomposition to Excavation

Before the artificial excavation projects Eisenman had established his reputation as architect and theoretician with numerous publications and a series of houses designed and built between 1967 and 1980.³ This period in his architectural practice corresponds to his directorship of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, an organization he founded in 1967 as a tribune for architectural discourse in the United States. The Institute, through the publication of the journal *Oppositions* and, starting in 1975, of the series *Oppositions Books*, had a profound impact on American architectural culture until its dissolution after Eisenman’s resignation in 1982.

During these thirteen years Eisenman’s work focused on the house. Influenced by the analytical methods of the architectural critic and teacher Colin Rowe, he studied closely the morphology of seminal works of the Modern Movement such as Le Corbusier’s 1920s villas and Giuseppe Terragni’s Casa del Fascio in Como (1932–1936).⁴ His search for an architectural syntax derived from these buildings was also prompted by his readings on structural linguistics, notably Noam Chomsky’s research on the “deep,” conceptual structure of language.⁵ Inspired by this linguistic model, Eisenman tackled

3. For a complete description of the houses, see Peter Eisenman, *Houses of Cards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Peter Eisenman, *House X* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), and Peter Eisenman, *Fin d’Ou T Hou S* (London: The Architectural Association, 1985). For a brief summary of the architect’s intentions at this time, see Carsten Juel-Christiansen, “Interview med Peter Eisenman,” *Skala* 12 (October 1987): 12.

4. Eisenman’s fascination with Terragni’s architecture is evident in the large number of articles he devoted to him. See, for example: Peter Eisenman, “Dall’oggetto alla relazionalità: la casa del Fascio di Terragni/From Object to Relationship: The Casa del Fascio by Terragni,” *Casabella* 344 (January 1970): 38–41 and “From Object to Relationship II: Giuseppe Terragni/Casa Giuliani Frigerio,” *Perspecta* 13 (1971): 37–65. See also Eisenman’s forthcoming *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994).

5. For a detailed analysis of the influence of structuralism on Eisenman’s work, see Mario Gandelonas, “From Structure to Subject: The Formation of an Architectural Language,” *Oppositions* 17 (summer 1979): 7–29, reprinted in Peter Eisenman, *House X* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982).

6. Gandelonas. "From Structure to Subject," p. 11.

7. Rosalind Krauss. "Death of the Hermeneutic Phantom: Materialization of the Sign in the Work of Peter Eisenman." *Architecture and Urbanism* 112 (January 198c): 207.

8. See Eisenman. *House X*.

9. Gandelonas. "From Structure to Subject," p. 23.

10. *Decomposition...proposes a radically altered process of making from either modernism or classicism. By proposing a process which at root is the negative or inverse of classical composition, the process uncovers (or deconstructs) relationships inherent in a specific object and its structure which were previously hidden by a classical sensibility. Rather than working from an original type toward a predictable end, decomposition starts with a heuristic approximation of end, an end which is immanent within the new object/process. The result is another kind of object, one which contains a non-existent future as opposed to an irretrievable past. In one sense it is making by analysis, but not the traditional classical formal analysis.* Peter Eisenman. "The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Difference." *The Harvard Architecture Review* 3 (winter 1984): 79.

11. Peter Eisenman. "Transformations, Decompositions, and Critiques: House X," in Eisenman. *House X*, p. 88.

the grammar of an autonomous and self-referential "language" of architectural form devoid of semantic content.⁶ His first four houses – House I (Barenholtz residence, Princeton, New Jersey, 1967–1968), House II (Falk residence, Hardwick, Vermont, 1969–1970), House III (Miller residence, Lakeville, Connecticut, 1969–1971), and House IV (unbuilt design, 1971) – are sophisticated formal studies of these modernist precedents.

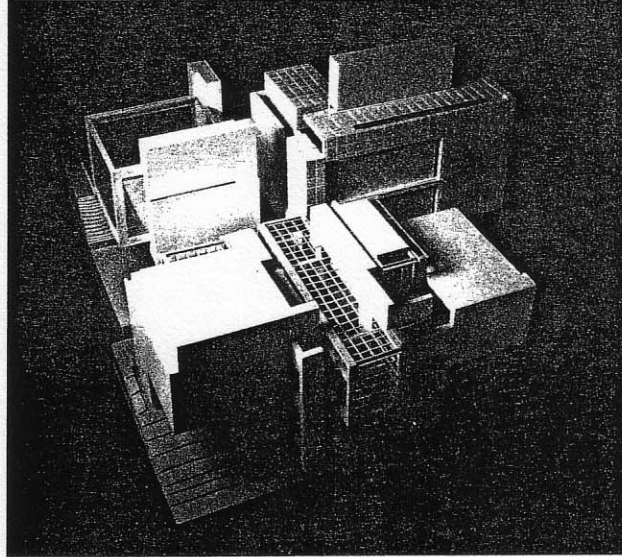


Fig. 1. Office of Peter Eisenman. Architect. Study model for House X (1975–1977). Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Courtesy Eisenman Architects

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

This shift was complete with House X (Aronoff residence, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, unbuilt design, 1975–1977; fig. 1).⁸ In this project Eisenman advanced his criticism of composition by attempting to suspend the human subject – whether creator or spectator – still implicit in his previous designs, which were based on the manipulation of Euclidean solids.⁹ To achieve this suspension, Eisenman developed "decomposition," a process by which he tried to circumvent both classical composition, based on rules reflecting an underlying order in nature, and what he termed "modernist transformation," a design process generated from ideal types.¹⁰ Eisenman's use of decomposition made him replace the cube, the preferred generating volume of his first houses, with the fragmentary "el," a three-sided portion of a hollow cube. House X is the result of the manipulation of four of these els separated by a cruciform void at the heart of the house, symbolic to Eisenman of the elimination of the human subject.¹¹

12. As noted by Anthony Vidler, "After the End of the Line." in *Peter Eisenman/EISENMAN: A MONOGRAPH*, ed. Toshio Nakamura (*Architecture and Urbanism*, special issue, August 1988): 150.

13. Peter Eisenman, "House XIa," *Architecture and Urbanism* 112 (January 1980): 225.

14. Eisenman gives a personal interpretation to this new interest in excavation: *I am very interested in psychology. The work of my digging projects (what I call my digging projects) started with sand boxes. The houses started to go down as well as up. When you forget the datum, the consciousness of the ground is there. It is all linked to my psychoanalysis which has to do with the fact that I realized that life did not begin at ground zero and work up but that it went down into the unconscious. When the unconscious became part of my work, I began to lose the centrism of rationalism and origins, clarity and purity, etc. The hole digging is a metaphor of my own unconscious.* Eisenman to Lynne Breslin, in "Interview: On Architecture of Text," *Space Design* 258 (March 1986): 64.

15. Eisenman had studied site earlier without, however, giving it the theoretical importance that it would gain later on. See the discussion of site in House X in Eisenman, "Transformations, Decompositions, and Critiques," pp. 152-157.

16. For Eisenman being responsive to the site does not mean accepting its current appearance: *To privilege "the site" as the context is to repress other possible contexts, is to become fixated on the presences of "the site," is to believe that "the site" exists as a permanent, knowable, whole. Such a belief, as has been discussed, is untenable today.* Peter Eisenman, "Moving Arrows. Eros and Other Errors," *Précis* 6 (spring 1987): 142.

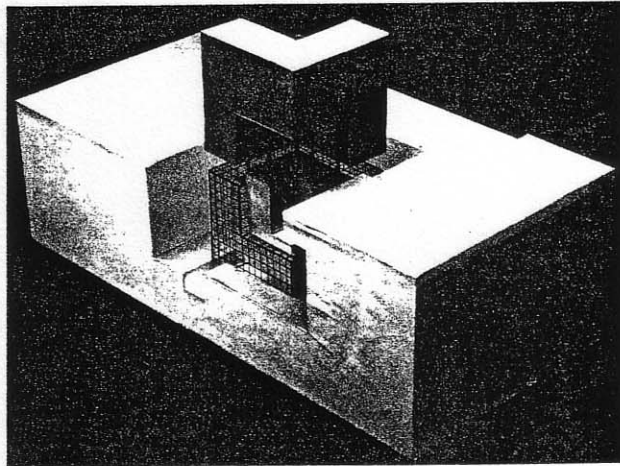


Fig. 2. Office of Peter Eisenman. Architect. *Presentation model for House 11a (1978), Palo Alto, California.* Courtesy Eisenman Architects

In the same way in which House VI marked the replacement of compositional strategies by textual ones, the last houses signal a break in Eisenman's thinking. With House 11a (Forster residence, Palo Alto, California, unbuilt design, 1978), House El Even Odd (unbuilt design, 1980), and Fin d'Ou T Hou S (project, 1983), the intentions displayed in the early houses were definitively abandoned.¹² House 11a, like the two other houses of that period, was assembled (or rather, decomposed) from House X's els (fig. 2). For Eisenman, the els, by putting an end to the tyranny of Euclidean geometry in House X, expressed the uncertainty and pluralism characteristic of the contemporary world that his client wished to address.¹³ The els become quasi-topological forms, unbroken surfaces which approximate the properties of topological objects such as the Möbius strip or the Klein bottle. The incompleteness of the els is echoed in the asymmetrical massing of the house, suggesting instability and imperfection, properties enhanced by the disquieting use of materials, most notably glazing in the floors. The unconventionality of the design is reinforced by the siting of House 11a partly underground, in an excavated hole. As the architect himself remarks, it is the first example of excavation in his work.¹⁴

As autonomous forms the houses disregarded the particularities of their sites, an attitude expressed by Eisenman's choice of axonometry as his preferred drawing technique. In contrast the Cities of Artificial Excavation directly address urban context.¹⁵ For Eisenman this new interest in the city did not mean replicating its formal or typological characteristics, as did the most banal postmodern architecture at that time.¹⁶ With his 1978 submission to the International Seminar of Design in Venice Eisenman began to explore urban sites with the same critical strategies tested in the last house projects. In this project he added, to the physical context of the assigned site, a construction of Le Corbusier's unrealized Venice Hospital, which he then distorted with "topological" deformations resembling the ones used in House 11a. Eisenman extended Le Corbusier's geometrical grid to cover the entire Venetian neighborhood and placed his excavations, which were shaped like the hospital's structural cores, on its coordinates (see cat. no. 28). Unlike authentic archaeology, these diggings do not attempt to discover evidence which would illuminate the history of the site but rather, as "absences."

17. Peter Eisenman, "Tre Testi per Venezia/Three Texts for Venice," *Domus* 611 (November 1980): 9.

express the meaninglessness of modernist rationality that Eisenman saw in Le Corbusier's design.¹⁷

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

*I am no longer interested in semiology. I am interested in poetics, and I think they are very different concerns. Equally, I am no longer interested in philosophy, but rather fiction. I think fiction is much more philosophical than philosophy. I do not have much relationship today with my earlier work dealing with syntax. I do not reject it or deny it. It merely is something else.... It is the poetic aspect of architecture which now interests me. No matter how many syntactically correct architectural sentences we might make, they may not contain poetry.*¹⁸

18. Peter Eisenman in Cesar Pelli, ed., *Yale Seminars in Architecture 2* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 49.

The Fictional City and the End of the Classical

The phrase Cities of Artificial Excavation embraces three main ideas: the relationship of architecture to the city; the elimination of the value attached to rational design processes; and the fictitious creation, through texts and drawings, of traces associated with the site. In pursuing these Eisenman refers to concepts he outlined in a seminal essay of 1984, entitled "The End of the Classical, the End of the Beginning, the End of the End."¹⁹ In this essay he identifies three "fictions" that have deluded architects since the fifteenth century and that need to be overcome. For Eisenman the quests for a timeless architecture (the "fiction of history"), a meaningful architecture (the "fiction of representation") and a true architecture (the "fiction of reason") have plagued the classic and the modern alike and have prevented the emergence of alternative architectural discourses and values. The Moderns might have claimed complete independence from the architecture of the past, yet Eisenman finds in their work the same ancient fascination with the classical ideal of the "timeless, meaningful, and true."²⁰ He explains how the Moderns rejected divine order, the timeless origin of architecture, only to replace it by their concern with representing historical progress in architecture. Their obsession with the prevailing conditions of culture became, paradoxically, a new timeless principle. They abandoned the imitation of the antique, but adopted function as a concept that gave meaning to their architecture. Finally, they discarded the classical search for caves, huts, and temples as the origins of a "true" architecture and replaced them with function, typology,

19. Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical, the End of the Beginning, the End of the End," *Perspecta* 21 (summer 1984): 154-173.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

and technique – all without questioning the very idea of truth in architecture.

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

One example of an artificial origin is a graft, as in the genetic insertion of an alien body into a host to provide a new result. As opposed to a collage or a montage, which lives within a context and alludes to an origin, a graft is an invented site, which does not so much have object characteristics as those of process. A graft is not in itself genetically arbitrary. Its arbitrariness is in its freedom from a value system of non-arbitrariness (that is, the classical). It is arbitrary in its provision of a choice of reading which brings no external value to the process. But further, in its artificial and relative nature a graft is not in itself necessarily an achievable result, but merely a site that contains motivation for action – that is the beginning of a process.²¹

21. Ibid., p. 168.

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

Grafting is made apparent in Eisenman’s notion of “scaling.”²² As a procedure which displaces and multiplies architectural plans of existing buildings or topographical contours of a given site and places them in altogether different contexts, thereby removing any fixed and identifiable reality, scaling preserves Eisenman’s interest in the modernist practice of defamiliarization, at play in the early houses.²³ It also systematizes the technique of superposition he

22. For a detailed account of scaling see Peter Eisenman, “L’inizio, la fine e ancora l’inizio/The Beginning, the End and the Beginning Again,” *Casabella* 520/521 (January/February 1986): 44–46.

23. For the importance to Eisenman of the modernist practice of defamiliarization, see Rosalind Krauss’s discussion of Viktor Shklovsky in “Death of the Hermeneutic Phantom” and K. Michael Hays, “From Structure to Site to Text: Eisenman’s Trajectory,” *Thinking the Present: Recent American Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1990), p. 64.

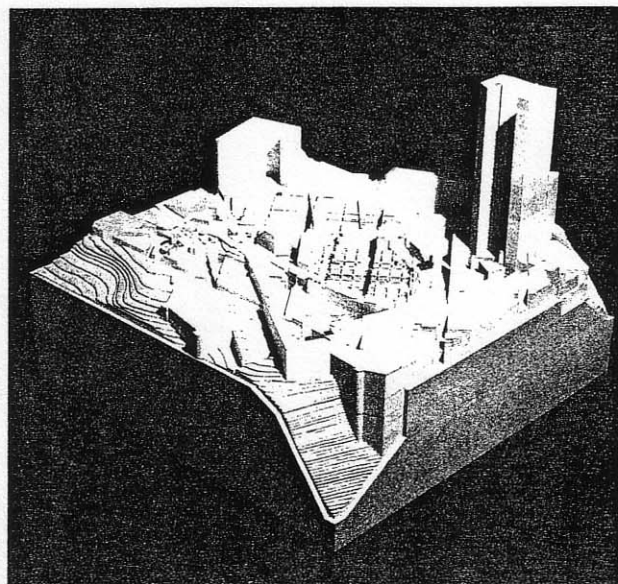


Fig. 3. Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects. “Labyrinth,” model for *Romeo and Juliet*, 1985. Courtesy Eisenman Architects

24. *I think the scaling has made superpositions as a strategy more conscious. It was probably not as conscious in Ohio State and I think it's an interesting point. It certainly was not conscious in Berlin. They were there. Scaling has brought up the notion of how do you register, how do you get those analogic relationships. Eisenman to Lynne Breslin. in "Interview: On Architecture of Text." p. 65.*

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

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

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

28. *It does not simulate the real, but represents and records the action inherent in a former or future reality, which has a value no more or less real than the trace itself. That is, the trace is unconcerned with forming an image which is the representation of a previous architecture or of social customs and usages; rather, it is concerned with the marking – literally the figuration – of its own internal processes. Thus the trace is the record of motivation, the record of an action, not an image of another object-origin. Peter Eisenman. "The End of the Classical, the End of the Beginning, the End of the End." p. 171.*

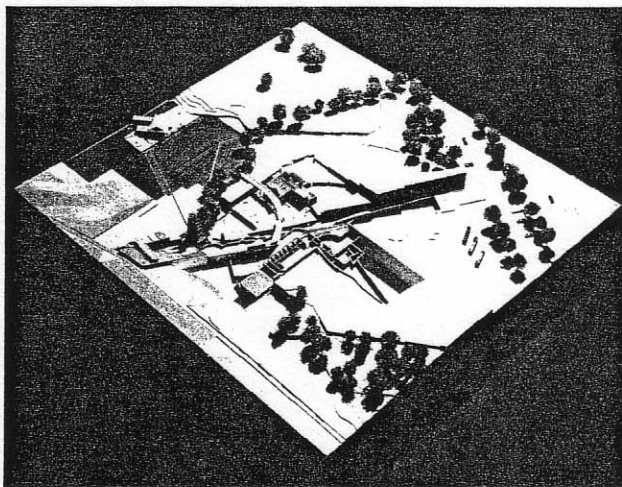


Fig. 4. Office of Eisenman/Robertson Architects. *Presentation model for University Art Museum, California State University at Long Beach, between June 2 and August 5, 1986.* Courtesy Eisenman Architects

uses in the Berlin and the Wexner projects, where he brings together different gridiron patterns that refer to distinct urban orders.²⁴ Scaling, as Eisenman defines it, encompasses three interdependent principles, which together constitute the operative model of his "not-classical" architecture. *Recursivity*, the recurrence of mathematical shapes through subdivision, is meant to destroy the primacy of the original; *self-similarity*, the proliferation of non-identical shapes, intends to eliminate human scale as a point of reference; and *discontinuity*, the fragmentation of geometric figures, tries to weaken the power implicit in geometric form. When Eisenman takes existing forms from historical maps of a given site and "scales" them according to a scenario associated with site or program, he not only eliminates traditional design methods based on causal relationships between architectural intention and form but also lays aside the self-referential, abstract language of his early houses.²⁵ Fiction is at the origin of this architectural process; its meaning is found in the riddle of the analogous relationships between figures.²⁶

This new interest in fiction is most evident in Eisenman's "Romeo and Juliet" project, presented at the Third International Exhibition of Architecture of the Venice Biennale in 1985 (fig. 3). Given the program of rehabilitating the castles associated with the Montagues and Capulets at Montecchio Maggiore in the Veneto, Eisenman begins with an analysis of the plot of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. He first associates each character with an emblematic architectural plan (the plan of Juliet's castle with Juliet, for example). He then directs these "architectural characters" in a series of scalings registered on the sites marking the significant events of the story (the union of Romeo and Juliet represented by the church in which they were married, their separation symbolized by Juliet's tomb, etc.). The scalings obtained are developed volumetrically in axonometrics and models according to the relationship of the characters in the scene.²⁷

In this project and in subsequent experiments at Long Beach and La Villette directly inspired by it, scaling never produces definitive architectural forms. It determines architectural objects which are only possible occurrences among many, moments in a continuous process of transformation.²⁸ Eisenman names two stages in this constant flux *palimpsest* and *quarry*. Beyond the actual conditions of the site as given to the architect, the palimpsest holds

the traces of the site's memories. Conversely, the quarry represents immanence, or latent future transformations. With scaling, the design process moves between the layered result of possible superpositions and the raw material for future excavations without ever achieving final synthesis.

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

In contrast to the complexity of the planimetric design, the three-dimensional development of the buildings of the Cities of Artificial Excavation is simple; the volumes are readily extruded from the plans. In the Long Beach project, Foam-Cor working models are used to explore the possibilities created by the vertical extrusion of the superpositions (see cat. nos. 103–110). Eisenman, evidently inspired by these three-dimensional studies, places most of the required spaces of the museum underground, on either side of a deep trench through which he provides access to the building (fig. 4). Eluding the issue of the facade, the spaces are contained within largely blank volumes. In the Wexner Center, the extruded volumes are relieved by the three-dimensional grid of the galleria and the fragments of the 1898 armory which formerly occupied the site. In both projects, Eisenman's underground architecture hides itself by imitating the landscape's contours. In this way it dramatically achieves his goal of destabilizing architecture's traditional figurative presence.²⁹

29. Kenneth Frampton. "Eisenman Revisited: Running Interference." in *Peter Eisenman/EISENMAN/AMNESIE*, ed. Toshio Nakamura (*Architecture and Urbanism*, special edition, August 1988): 61. and. in the same issue. Anthony Vidler. "After the End of the Line." p. 158.

Building

The dedication of the Wexner Center on November 17, 1989, marks the conclusion of Eisenman's artificial excavations. The only built project of the series (excluding the housing in Berlin, only partially realized), the Wexner Center opened when Eisenman was already exploring new concerns. He identifies the unrealized Guardiola house at Cadiz (1988) as the turning point (fig. 5). Abandoning the simple extrusion of two-dimensional superpositions determined by scaling, Eisenman creates in the Guardiola design a complex, three-dimensional form. His signature els, earlier eclipsed by cartography, return; their interpenetration produces volumetrically what

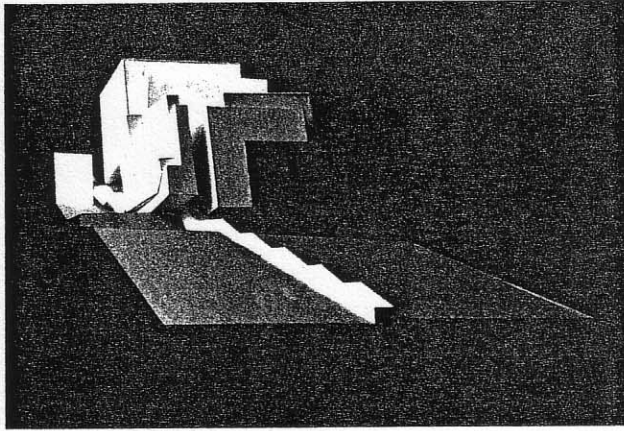


Fig. 5. Office of Eisenman Architects. *Conceptual model for Guardiola house (1988), Cadiz.* Courtesy Eisenman Architects

was once achieved in plan. The more recent projects such as the Biology Center for the J. W. Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Germany (unbuilt project, 1987), or the Carnegie-Mellon Research Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (unbuilt project, 1988), develop these formal manipulations, now with the help of computers (fig. 6). Eisenman's desire to eliminate the authorial presence of the architect, implicit in the deanthropomorphizing process of his houses and excavations, is fulfilled through the computer's ability to create forms without human intervention.³⁰

30. *What I have started to do is to use the computer, and the computer starts to generate figures for me, which I could not generate by hand. I believe my hand is limited by my classical aesthetics. Our hands and eyes are all trained in a certain way. The computer frees me and produces forms that I do not understand, and do not even think I like. They contain some magic for me, some energy; something mystical.* Carsten Juel-Christiansen, "Interview med Peter Eisenman," p. 12.

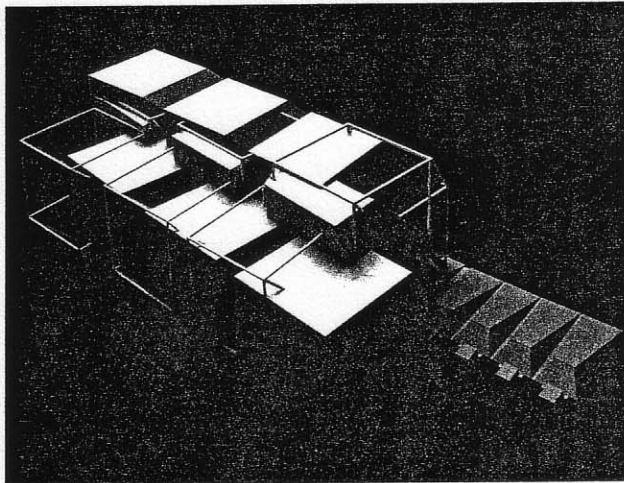
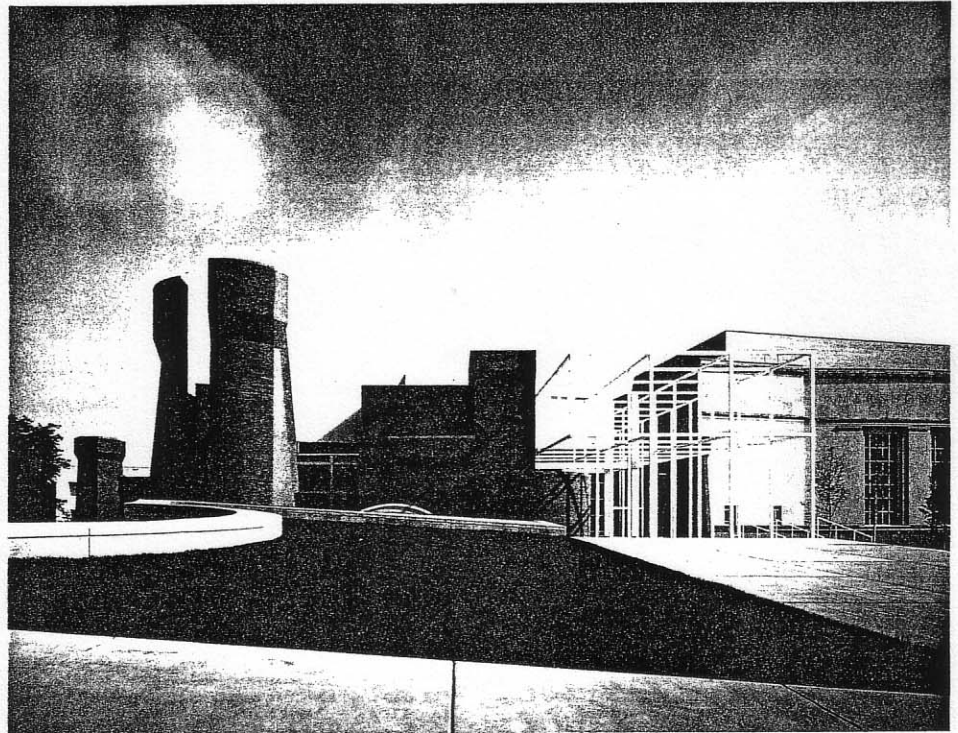


Fig. 6. Office of Eisenman Architects. *Conceptual model for Carnegie-Mellon Research Institute (1988), Pittsburgh.* Courtesy Eisenman Architects

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

While all initial moves in my work are still informed by my theoretical work, I now believe, perhaps because I am working at a large scale, that the

Fig. 7. Office of Eisenman/
Robertson Architects. Main entry
showing reconstructed Armory.
Wexner Center for the Visual Arts
(1983–1989). Columbus, Ohio.
Courtesy Eisenman Architects



haptic and sensuous qualities in real space are important; while these may have nothing to do with theory, they do affect the same space, which in turn is impacted by theory. The more I learn to put things together, and you cannot do that from drawing, but rather from the fact of building, the more my spaces will be able to articulate my theoretical concerns.³¹

31. David Cohn, "Entrevista/
Interview," *El Croquis* 41
(December 1989): 12.

32. Vidler wryly remarks that it was easier to criticize monumentality in architecture when Eisenman's projects remained on paper. However, he believes that Eisenman succeeded in the Wexner project. For Vidler the Wexner Center's conflictual arrangement of fragmented building parts have produced a schizophrenic, monstrous architecture relevant to our time. Anthony Vidler, "Countermonuments in Practice: The Wexner Center for the Visual Arts," in *Wexner Center for the Visual Arts. The Ohio State University* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 34 and pp. 37–38.

This statement is perhaps less discordant with the architect's earlier intentions than it appears. Even at the time of his most daring experiments with decomposition and scaling, Eisenman had never intended to limit himself to the drawing board. As Anthony Vidler points out, the real issue that the most recent projects confront is his capacity to construct a critical, "non-monumental" architecture.³² It remains to be seen if Eisenman can successfully achieve this goal; nevertheless the drawings, models, and texts of the *Cities of Artificial Excavation* stand as witnesses to an alternative practice which, at the time of postmodernism's nostalgic return to a reputedly autonomous and timeless classical architecture, broke from the narrow limits of architecture and reestablished its relevance among the contemporary arts.