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ON EISENMAN'S USE OF HISTORY

MICHAEL JASPER

Abstract

This paper examines the historical work of architect, educator and theorist Peter Eisenman (b. 1932) through the filter of his writings on Italian architect Giuseppe Terragni (1904–1943). The paper gives parallel focus to the range of architectural forms and ideas considered and the kinds of analytical drawings used in Eisenman's decades long engagement with Terragni. Adopting a comparative methodology, the paper examines four texts published between 1963 and 2003. A number of questions are considered: Is one manner of historical analysis a more direct method, one more identical to the object of study? What are the differences among the texts in terms of the design problems and the spatial effects revealed? How might such methods of analysing works from architecture's recent past inform contemporary design practice? The paper suggests potential lessons for architectural history as a critical, open-ended project and proposes that certain approaches such as Eisenman's to materials and phenomena from architecture's past can critically advance the practice and theory of architecture today.

Key words:
architecture, form, historical
project, practice, Peter Eisenman,
Giuseppe Terragni

1. Introduction

Peter Eisenman¹, the theorist and historian, characterises his activity as a practice of analysis or, more recently, as *close reading*.² The term and practice of close reading has a long provenance for Eisenman, blending broad tendencies (art historical, hermeneutic, linguistic, post-modern, structural) and channelling specific influences including those of Deleuze, Derrida, Jameson, Krauss, Rowe, Tafuri, Wittkower, and Wölfflin.³

Four texts will be considered in this analysis of Eisenman's historical work: relevant sections of *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* (1963), *From Object to Relationship* parts one and two (1970, 1971a), *The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Difference* (1984), and *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques* (2003a) with an emphasis on the concluding section of that book and the idea of the critical. Each of the four texts renders a specific relation to history and how to use it. In order to provide an appropriately narrow frame of reference for this paper, Eisenman's writings on Giuseppe Terragni – an occupation of his for more than forty years – provide the basic comparative material for analysis. It is not proposed that these four texts establish a sequential development or an evolution, whether in thought, analytical strategy, device, or form. It is suggested, more modestly, that they provide an index of different manners of historical analysis as close reading.

The paper is organised in three sections. Firstly, I introduce the germinal questions and approach. Then, I examine key concepts, methodological assumptions, and analytic tools across four texts of Eisenman. This entails a comparative survey of his engagements with certain buildings of Giuseppe Terragni. Eisenman's work on Terragni is used to illustrate the impact of different themes and historical/critical efforts. Lastly, the paper discusses differences among the four texts and describe shifts in Eisenman's use of history.

1.1 Propositions and Approach

This paper is not trying to hypothesise about the relation of Eisenman to Terragni, or track the many design problems and lessons of Terragni revealed in Eisenman's various analyses. By the same token, it is not looking at the specificity of Eisenman's readings of Terragni when compared to other readings such as those of Giorgio Cucci, Daniel Libeskind, and Bruno Zevi.

Rather, this analysis is a preliminary survey taking as object of study different kinds of close reading used across a limited set of what is here called Eisenman's historical writings. The paper does not propose that the four historical writings establish a sequential development or an evolution in thought, analytical style, or form. The paper considers, more modestly, points of view, key terms, composition principles, and drawing

1 Peter Eisenman (b. 1932) is an American architect, educator, and theorist, and principal of New York-based Eisenman Architects. He has taught at the University of Cambridge, Cooper Union, Harvard University, Ohio State University, and Princeton University. He is the Charles Gwathmey Professor in Practice at the Yale School of Architecture. Major projects from his practice include the Wexner Center for the Arts (Columbus, 1989), the Arnonoff Center for Design and Art (Cincinnati, 1996), the Staten Island Institute for Arts and Sciences (Staten Island, 2001), and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Berlin, 2005).

According to his office website (www.eisenmanarchitects.com), current architectural projects include the six-building City of Culture of Galicia in Santiago de Compostela, a railroad station in Pompei, and the Pinerba Condominium in Milan. Eisenman has published extensively. Recent books include *Diagram Diaries* (1999), *Ten Canonical Buildings: 1950–2000* (2002), *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques* (2003a), *Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963–1988* (2004b), and *Written into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990–2004* (2007).

2 For the purposes of this paper, the terms 'analysis', 'reading' and 'close reading' are used interchangeably. They describe the activity of Eisenman the historian in front of his object of study. In the simplest of formulas, Eisenman's object of study is the relation between forms (building plans, elevations, sections, axonometric drawings) and ideas (from inside and outside the discipline of architecture).

3 A separate paper would be needed to track the range of forces at play and their respective impact at any one moment in Eisenman's work.

styles in each as a way to examine Eisenman's use of history and provide an introduction to this aspect of his multifaceted work.

As to the basic assumptions, the first proposition about Eisenman's working method is that in his various treatments of, work on, and use of Terragni can be found traces of Eisenman's own oscillating approach to the process of design. Given the limits of this paper, this first proposition will only be treated in an oblique manner.

The second is that no one, single, analytic style or close reading method is a more pure or more direct method for describing composition moves, form relations, and spatial effects in a work of architecture. It is suggested, on the other hand, that different architectures and processes call for different styles of close reading.

The third proposition is that such methods of historical analysis can inform contemporary and future design practices.

1.2 Eisenman and the use of history

Eisenman alludes to but does not ever fully articulate a theory of his use of history, nor describe strategic assumptions underpinning this aspect of his work. An analysis of key texts does however demonstrate the existence of, if not a theory, then at least certain biases or assumptions.

The process of close reading for Eisenman almost always involves a re-drawing and re-writing of the object of study to display singular architectural conditions, form relations, and composition devices. In this re-drawing, Eisenman is able to identify differences from other conditions and, in turn, speculate on their relation to specific ideas.

This practice is evident right from the beginning of Eisenman's career. In 1963, he completes his doctoral dissertation *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* in which buildings of modernism's immediate past are examined to reveal generative and transformational formal moves. Such moves, in relation to conjectural development phases of a project, or the building as realised, provide a potential description of architectural intention and conceptual content.

In subsequent decades, Eisenman deploys additional and different approaches to close reading in the history of architecture. In his introduction to *Ten Canonical Buildings: 1950–2000* for example, Eisenman suggests that his reading methodology has varied between the formal, the textual, and the phenomenological (2002, p. 16). Buildings by architects ranging from Scamozzi to Schinkel to Stirling are captured at different stages.

As Eisenman points out in his 1969 essay on different approaches to architectural history, historical analysis can form «*a basis for understanding the relation between ideas and formal invention of an architecture.*» (Eisenman, 1969, p. 75) It is perhaps in this endless and open pursuit of understanding relationships between form and ideas in architecture that the largest potential in Eisenman's historical writing resides.

1.3 Scholarly Context

The majority of secondary material on Eisenman has focused on his architectural design projects, the relation of the projects or his writing to architectural theory, or the trajectory and place of the projects within the history of the discipline or Eisenman's own practice. There does exist, however, a small body of secondary work on his approach to, and use of, history.

While the divisions between his work as practicing architect, historian and theorist are often hard to identify or to maintain in an extended way, it is possible to isolate certain themes in this body of secondary writing. The secondary writings of Stan Allen, Pier Vittorio Aureli, Raphael Moneo, and Anthony Vidler provide an especially useful context in this regard.

Allen (2002) provides a useful first setting for approaching Eisenman's work on history. Citing the analysis of James Stirling's *Leicester Engineering Building*, the impact of Eisenman's practice of close reading, writes Allen, «*is to make contradiction and discontinuity visible*» (2002, p. 10). As will be seen, this '*making discontinuity visible*' – different from a desire to establish continuous, stable, closed narratives – will be a recurrent theme.

Compared to Allen, Raphael Moneo's analysis of Eisenman emphasises its potential for architectural practice. For Moneo, Eisenman occupies a hinge position in contemporary practice, summing up a period and at the same time acting as a catalyst for the next one. What Moneo tracks, as a companion to his analysis of specific projects, is a turn in the way Eisenman thinks through the discipline's history. The turn, according to Moneo, moves from an autonomous architecture to one which is bound by the present. In this turn there is an obligation for architecture to incorporate the outside within itself, the outside world becoming what Moneo calls an «*accomplice*» to the project (Moneo, 2004, p. 170).

The role of historical phenomena in Eisenman's writing and projects is a minor incident in Moneo's more emphatic chronological review of the theoretical biases underpinning specific architectural projects. One relevant example of the former, however, is Eisenman's reading of plans by Scamozzi. Out of Eisenman's reading of Scamozzi, «*the inapprehensible, indescribable mechanism of form generation*» in Scamozzian architecture is revealed (Moneo, 2004, p. 174). The aim of the analyses of historical

phenomenon can be claimed therefore to make manifest points of resistance: things that do not hold, or do not align with norms, standards, or types.

While searching for mannerist traits in Eisenman's writing and projects, Pier Vittorio Aureli concludes that what characterises Eisenman's theoretical work on the site of architecture's past is seeing history as fragments, as distinct from a vision of history as composed of models. This is history as «*heterogeneous fragments*» (Aureli, 2004, p. 69). Aureli goes so far as to identify architecture with history, putting forward a claim for «*architecture as history and therefore as a heterogeneous collection of forms and principles*» (2004, p. 69). Where Allen focused on an open-ended relation to the historical project per se, and Moneo on what it might mean for practice, Aureli emphasises the potential identification of the two via Eisenman.

In a recent essay, Anthony Vidler returns to the theme of Eisenman's productive inconsistency, though in a form and context different from that of Allen discussed above. Vidler reviews *Palladio Virtuel*, a 2012 exhibition conceived and designed by Eisenman around twenty Palladian villas. The exhibition's importance according to Vidler lies in its innovative analytical and historical methodologies as manifest in the drawings, conjectural models, and installation.⁴ Eisenman's manner of working on and using historical material reinforces, according to Vidler, an awareness of architecture's «*constant comprehension of undecidability, and an awareness of indeterminacy... [the architecture in a state of] unending irresolution*» (Vidler, 2012, p. 92).

4 The exhibition was co-curated by Eisenman and Matt Roman and held at the Yale School of Architecture in October 2012.

A number of themes emerge in these secondary writings: the idea of history as revealing indeterminacies; the alignment or identity of analytic methods in historical close reading and design processes for projects; the open-ended nature of Eisenman's close reading method.

2. Analysis

A preliminary differentiation of the four texts by Peter Eisenman chosen for this study – *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture, From Object to Relationship*, *The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Difference*, and *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques* – suggests that they reveal an oscillating focus on architecture as object, on relationships (between ideas, forms and the discipline of architecture to itself), and finally on the object's disappearance (or a provisional absence of interest or loss of faith of treating architecture as autonomous). In addition there is an emerging sense of the critical in Eisenman's emphatic turn toward the discipline and disciplinary knowledge as the architect's primary responsibility.

2.1 Formal Analysis: The Object

In *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, Eisenman analyses two of Terragni's buildings, the *Casa del Fascio* and the *Asilo Infantile*. His analysis is based on four generic properties of architectural form. These are volume, mass, surface and movement (Eisenman, 1963, p. 57). These in turn are framed by two primary formal categories or conditions: linear and centroidal. Eisenman relies on these two to distinguish formal decisions underlying specific distributions among the four properties.

Having established a preliminary matrix of relations, two points of view are announced at the beginning of *The Formal Method*: the conceptual and the pictorial. In his dissertation, Eisenman downplays the pictorial. In this way, the text reveals an underlying resistance to the pictorial here equated by Eisenman with the phenomenal or perceptual (1963, p. 321). The emphasis is thus directed toward the conceptual, revealed for example during the course of his analysis of *Asilo Infantile* where Eisenman provides a tight formula for this point of view:

On initial examination, in purely pictorial or perceptual terms, the first project [for the Asilo Infantile] might be considered to be the more interesting of the two. These analyses, however, are not conceived of in terms of the pictorial and perceptual qualities of any building but rather are an investigation of its conceptual basis and therefore its generic state. Hence in conceptual terms, since all form must have an absolute reference... (Eisenman, 1963, p. 321)

And slightly later:

In both Terragni buildings [Casa del Fascio and Asilo Infantile], it is obvious that the specific form of each element is deprived from an absolute condition; the form itself only receiving its specific meaning from a conceptual reference to this condition. (1963, p. 335)

The underlying proposition for Eisenman is that both buildings are examples of a centroidal condition, one of two general, underlying formal systems. In his analysis of the *Casa del Fascio*, several themes dominate. A primary one is that of a surface versus mass dialectic: an example of the impact and deformations or distortions that a centroidal system undergoes when confronted with a single entry (Eisenman, 1963, pp. 108, 134). In the fuller analysis, the moves are dominated by Eisenman's volumetric reading which assumes a full cube as the absolute beginning condition which is then sliced in half horizontally with the courtyard shifted as a consequence of the impact and force of the entry.⁵

Eisenman's analysis thus begins with a system or economy of working, the terms of reference assuming at a fundamental level four generic properties (volume, mass, surface, movement), and absolute or formal conditions (linear, centroidal). To this various factors are introduced: site forces, movement vectors, and aesthetic concepts such as symmetry.

5 On this point, the mass readings set out in figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 (p. 294) and figure 27 (p. 306) are indicative of the general effort. Eisenman (1963).

These factors lead to changes in or deformation of the base condition that in turn produces a specific form. Distension, distortion, and stressing are the kinds of effects that leave their marks. Conjectural reconstructions are adopted as diagrammatic tools in the analysis.

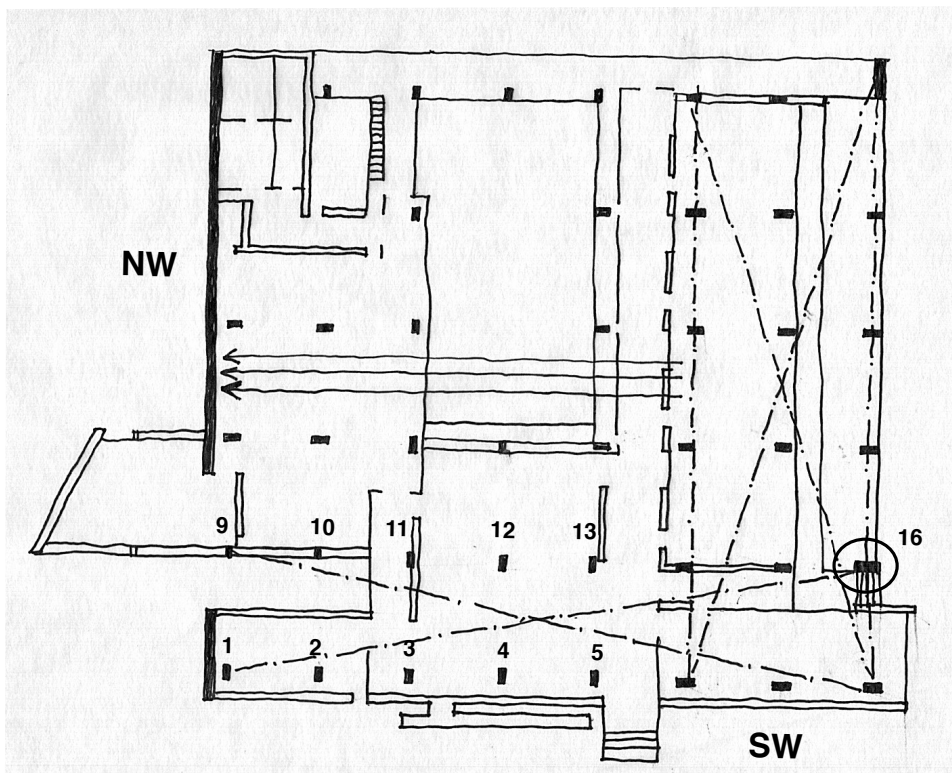
As one example of Eisenman's approach, the case of column 16 in Teragni's *Asilo Infantile* can be used. Eisenman diagrams the potential spatial tensions – and the physical torqueing caused by such tensions – between the south-west (front) facade and the north-west (side) facade (1963, p. 334). The analytic diagrams, with their use of highlighting, banding, and arrows illustrate the conceptual questions of interest to Eisenman. See figure 1.

Along with the *Casa del Fascio*, the *Asilo Infantile* is described as a centroidal system, this one read in response to a frontal entry, now off of a linear external vector (1963, p. 133). Eisenman discusses in detail the traces of distortions from earlier design development schemes in relation to the scheme as built.

Six analysis drawings in the section on *Asilo* are particularly revealing in this regard.⁶ The *Asilo Infantile* does not return in Eisenman's writing, which is perhaps a sign of shifted interest in terms of the lessons identified or problems tested. What the *Asilo* does convey or illustrate is a detailed reading of the potential syntactical force of columns.

⁶ See Eisenman (1963), pp. 332–335.

Figure 1. Tension and torqueing around Column 16. *Casa Infantile*, Giuseppe Teragni (after Eisenman, 1963, p. 332).



2.2 Relationships

From Object to Relationship is published in *Casabella* in 1970, *From Object to Relationship II* in *Perspecta* in 1971. These essays provide an illuminating example of how Eisenman uses examples from Terragni and how his approach changes since the Cambridge dissertation of eight years earlier.

Eisenman introduces a key distinction in the two articles, that between surface or sensual aspects of a building, and deep or conceptual aspects. He locates on the side of surface such aspects as texture, colour, and shape. These engender perceptual responses (1971a, p. 38). The deep is occupied with conceptual relationships among forms, physical elements, or space. Eisenman lists several form conditions in this category including frontality, obliqueness, recession, elongation, compression, and shear (1971a, p. 39). Surface aspects are concerned more with conditions of fact, deep aspects are concerned with speculations on ideas.

As implied in the title of Eisenman's articles, there is a change of focus from architecture as object to potential categories of relationships engendered in architecture. The articles explore and characterise techniques needed for moving from a reading of architecture as object (which Eisenman describes as a primarily perceptual response) to architectural conditions as relationship (which Eisenman describes of an essentially conceptual nature). Eisenman calls these techniques «*transformational methods*», or devices, and he focuses in this article on one technique in particular: that of the use of ambiguity as both a methodological tool and as an aim or objective (1971a, pp. 40, 60).

In *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, the concept of ambiguity is only a minor reference. In *From Object to Relationship* it takes on an up-front role. References to, and use of, generic or absolute conditions are no longer so present, or at least are more in the background in the 1971 text when compared to the 1963 text. To illustrate the ideas, Eisenman turns again to Terragni. To emphasise his general distinction between surface or perceptual and deep or conceptual architectures, Eisenman locates Terragni on the side of the conceptual. Ambiguities in Terragni's building are revealed in a series of analytic diagrams intended to make the existence of abstract formal relationships more legible.

The reading of the drawings and building as built lead to a narrative about «*the building's semantic intent*». (1971a, p. 41) In this regard, the «*From*» in the title *From Object to Relationship* serves to differentiate a perceptual or pictorial reading and a conceptual one. At the end of the text, Eisenman gives a clear statement of the change in view point since the dissertation. It is worth citing in its entirety:

... if it is accepted that the problem of a search for new meaning from formal constructs is important, then a shift from an 'object' to a 'relationship' orientation is one possible way to conceive of the problem. Given such a change in focus, the establishment of both a surface and deep level syntax as well as the development of transformational methods, which relate the specific forms to a series of formal universals become necessary. (Eisenman, 1971a, p. 61)

In order to illustrate this change of focus, Eisenman turns to Terragni's *Casa Giuliani-Frigerio*, a project that will accompany his work without cease in subsequent decades. The intent of the drawing analysis is clearly stated: the purpose of Eisenman's analysis is to make more understandable the relationship between a deep «*latent conceptual structure*» and the building as a built object (1971a, p. 42).

In terms of drawing styles, Eisenman deploys axonometric drawings, isolating conditions and oscillating around a number of primary readings including volumetric versus planar, and effects such as erosion, subtraction, addition, and residue. Eisenman starts with a mass reading but it is the planar readings which occupy the majority of the effort.⁷ The east facade, starting with an oblique view and direct projection elevations, is then presented in a sequence of axonometric drawings that illustrate the architectural problems and diagrammatic techniques.⁸ The form conditions examined include inside/outside (non-)correspondences, solids eroded or cut, planar versus solid oscillation, and an implied movement or overall animation of facade elements. See figure 2.

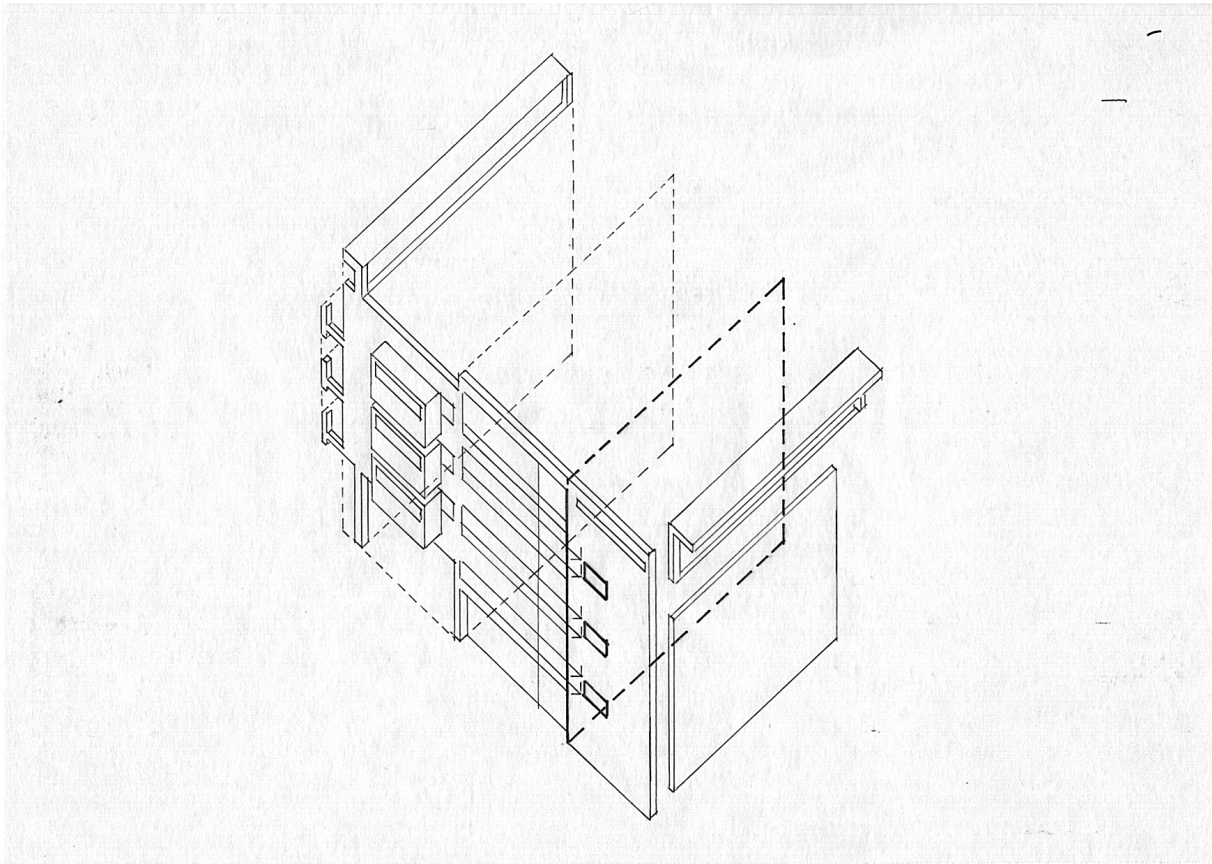
7 For the mass reading, see in particular Eisenman (1972), p. 42: figures 3, 4.

8 See Eisenman (1972), p. 52: figures 29, 30; and pp. 53–54: figures 31–34.

Eisenman works on five versions of Terragni's building designs and names them schemes A, B, C, D, Final. As he is clear to point out, his aim is not to create a narrative account of changes – though key changes are noted – but to use them to narrow in or refine an analytic language (both in text and drawing) in relation to the impact and meaning of formal moves.

For example, the balcony in Terragni's Scheme B projects from the southwest corner of the *Casa Giuliani Frigerio*. Eisenman writes that, as a consequence of its specific projection, a cascade of effects ensue, including a «*planar stratification*» (1971a, p. 42). Other moves result to reinforce, inhibit or constrain certain form relationships. The bent frame of the north facade, for example, is used to highlight the difference between effects of eroding a solid versus spatial layering, a condition he will return to thirty years later (1971a, p. 47).

Eisenman uses axonometric drawings to display bay readings in elevation as well as diagrams of conjectural states of addition or subtraction to speculate on possible prior conditions or states of tension. The four



figures discussed above realise this position. A specific device noted by Eisenman is that of the oblique, stating «*Giuliani-Frigerio demands the oblique*» (1971a, p. 51). Different from *The Formal Basis* where the diagonal was put on hold or at least not specifically sought after, the diagonal and the oblique are now seen as devices used to intentionally construct or retain ambiguities (Eisenman, 1963, p. 313).

The phrase «*demands the oblique*» arises near the end of a discussion of the different formal relationships and the different spatial energies which can be found in *Casa del Fascio* versus those of Giuliani-Frigerio. In his analysis of the east facade of Giuliani-Frigerio this tactic is revealed. Eisenman writes: «... *the reading of a tripartite reticulated grid is suppressed and the ambiguity is developed between readings of eroded solid and planar layering*» (1971a, p. 52). This supports Eisenman's proposal to think in analytical and not historical terms, further reinforcing the above suggestion that ambiguity is highly valued (1971a, p. 61).

2.3 Decomposition, or Getting Over Objects

Eisenman's PhD dissertation *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture* (1963) can be said, generally, to be concerned with charting distortions from an object's generic condition whether real or speculative. The two primary generic conditions according to centroidal or linear. His essays

Figure 2. Eroded solid and planar layering. East Facade, Casa Giuliani-Frigerio, Giuseppe Terragni (after Eisenman, 1971a, p. 53).

entitled *Object to Relationship* (1970–1971) articulate potential effects resulting between forms or conditions.

In order to understand the singular position of the third text considered – *The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Difference* – two citations from the text will be used. The first citation clearly establishes a gap from the dissertation’s assumption of a generic or absolute state and thus a shift in viewpoint as compared with the two other writing pieces examined above:

... *there seems to be no stable or original condition from which such an internal history can either begin or be read.* (Eisenman, 1984, p. 78)

This should be compared to the earlier viewpoints which assume absolutes or formal universals. The second citation introduces the spatial consequences of what Eisenman calls a post-modernist or post-historical sensibility:

Whereas the modernist idea of dispersal, incongruity, and fragment is ultimately projected to return the system to closure, the Giuliani-Frigerio apartment block is a set of fragments which is fundamentally incomplete. Each time a condition of origin is suggested visually, it’s resolution in the actual building is refuted. It would seem that a shift of bay here or volume there would indicate a single axis of symmetry, but when the mental move is in fact made, something else becomes unstable and suggests another axis of symmetry. These incongruent axes, in themselves, are a straightforward definition of the idea of difference; they signal the impossibility of a return to a type form. (Eisenman, 1984, p. 78)

How is *Giuliani-Frigerio* used in this 1984 article? What is at stake in the kinds of historical practice released in this article? To recall our opening questions, how does Terragni function here? What to make of the «*futility*» in the title of this article?

On this last question, one interpretation is the impossibility of a return to a type-form. As Eisenman writes: «*In decomposition, there is no type form, there is no ground zero*» (1984, p. 78). The ideal of type form can be claimed for both classical and modern points of view. In the post-modern point of view described by Eisenman this ideal does not exist. A stable or original condition, one signalled by the idea and ideal of type in classical and modern viewpoints according to Eisenman, is no longer assumed to exist.

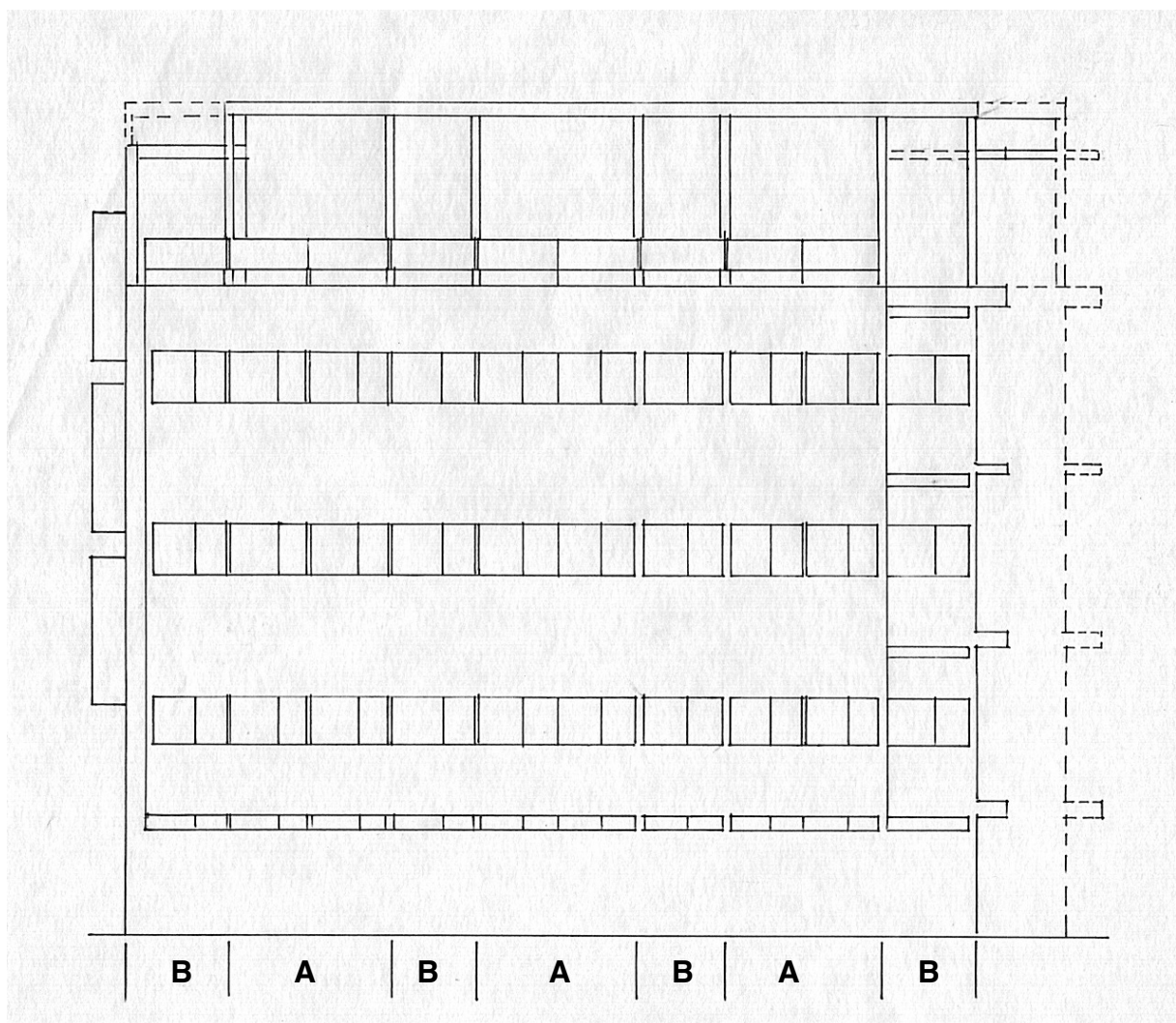
In support of this reading, Eisenman uses plan analyses more emphatically than in the 1970 and 1971 articles. In that sense, the text echoes the plan-dominant mode of the 1963 dissertation. The plans of Barry’s *Houses of Parliament*, Palladio’s *Palazzo Della Torre*, Scamozzi’s *Fabrica Fino*, and *Hadrian’s Villa* are all referenced. But it is direct projection eleva-

tions that function as the primary analytic vehicle in this article and Terragni's *Giuliani-Frigerio* returns as its primary support. *Giuliani-Frigerio* appears after the *Palazzos Minelli, Surian, and Foscarini, Hadrian's Villa, the Houses of Parliament, and the Fabrica Fino* are called up. They all represent instances where an «*extra-compositional*» reading is needed, one that differs from, or resists, classical and modern points of view (Eisenman, 1984, p. 70). See figure 3.

Terragni's *Giuliani-Frigerio* returns specifically to give evidence, revealing aspects of what Eisenman names a third, post-modern sensibility. According to Eisenman, this third sensibility is characterised by an oscillation of plane and volume, an oscillation never settling down and thriving in «*unresolved symmetries and asymmetries*» (Eisenman, 1984, p. 73).⁹ Eisenman goes on to identify a series of composition problems – including symmetry, asymmetry, a missing ideal or stable origin – in support of his reading of a non-classical, non-modernist manner.

9 Look at illustrations 40, 41, 46, and 47 (pp. 75, 76) of the article.

Figure 3. Virtual transformations. North Facade, *Casa Giuliani-Frigerio*, Giuseppe Terragni (after Eisenman, 1984, p. 77).



Seventeen analytic drawings of *Giuliani-Frigerio* are provided in Eisenman's analysis. How do they differ from the facade analyses, for example, of Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky in their study of Michelangelo's proposal for the facade of *San Lorenzo*? (Rowe and Slutzky, 1971) Sketched out over twenty-one variations, the *San Lorenzo* diagrams illustrate potential figures within the elevations. These include variations on H, T, cruciform, checker board, T and L-shaped figures. The Rowe/Slutzky approach can be compared to that of Eisenman, the latter focused on drawing out conceptual conditions of an implied or emergent nature. Eisenman's work in this regard has an explicit future focus, the analyses or close readings serving as «*beginnings*» (1984, p. 67).

What differences or similarities does such a comparison reveal about the enterprise? Both Eisenman and Rowe/Slutzky share an interest in ambiguity and a state which is different from or resists simple figure/ground dichotomies (Eisenman, 1984, p. 73; Rowe and Slutzky, 1971, p. 300). Eisenman argues for a radical fragment which never recalls or is attracted to a whole, whereas Rowe/Slutzky conclude that it is the «*field revealed as positive*» that makes the productions of, for the example, the Mondrian of *Victory Boogie Woogie* and the Michelangelo of *San Lorenzo* so similar (Rowe and Slutzky, 1971, p. 300). Both rely on example from Venice in their arguments, with Eisenman turning to the Palazzos *Minelli*, *Surian*, and *Foscarini*, and Rowe/Slutzky to the *Ca d'Oro* for support.

The differences are instructive for clarifying Eisenman's work. Rowe/Slutzky claim simple interest in the perceptual activities that produce oscillations. Eisenman's aim is to remain at the level of the conceptual, his interest in part directed to conditions of symmetry and asymmetry. What is new in the 1984 text of Eisenman is an explicit foregrounding of part-to-part relationships. Different from the part-to-whole relationships which underpin the Rowe/Slutzky manner of reading *San Lorenzo*, Eisenman employs a reading of part-to-part conditions. The latter is what I believe is essentially new and an index of the process which Eisenman calls decomposition.

Eisenman, to continue, postulates on a larger or longer trajectory, in this case three moments of design philosophy or styles of design method. The three styles as briefly noted are that of composition (classical), transformation (modernist), and decomposition (post-modernist). Reading the footnotes in Eisenman's essay, there is another shift that can be seen to have occurred or at least sensed, even if it remains in the shadows. I believe there is a different status and role for composition and a shift in the manner of using the north facade reading of *Giuliani Frigerio* since the early 1970s publications.

These three processes of making – classical composition, modern transformation, and post-modern decomposition – serve as names for a series

of design processes and by implication, different architectures (1984, p. 186). The third kind of making, that of decomposition, is a «*making by analysis*» according to Eisenman (1984, p. 186). The time it happens in or postulates is fundamentally of the present. There is no future, nor an ideal past. The future and the past are relegated to the status of dreams conditions belonging to the modern and classical viewpoints respectively. From this arrangement, Eisenman introduces the idea of history as making, or as he described it, of «*making by analysis*» (1984, p. 186).

2.4 Terragni Redux – A Critical Text

Terragni and the Idea of a Critical Text first appeared in 2003 as the closing section of the book which so miraculously animates the potential for architectural thinking at work in Terragni's *Casa del Fascio* and *Casa Giuliani Frigerio*. It was later reprinted in a slightly amended form as a separate chapter in the second volume of his selected writings, *Written into the Void* (Eisenman, 2007, pp. 126–132). It contains certain themes seen in the other texts, transformations to some of these themes, and introduces others.

There are at least three changes – shifts in nuance, orientation or focus – that are working within the text as compared to the previous texts considered. The first change occurs in the way Eisenman lays emphasis on architectural thought, that is, thinking by means of the processes and objects of architecture. Surface over space is a second theme or distinguishing aspect in this text. A third is Eisenman's turn to perception and the perceptual, a turn to the potential for a «*different kind of perception*» (Eisenman, 2003a, p. 296). The effect or consequence generally is to define differences between things, not only architectural differences but also historical/analytical points of view.

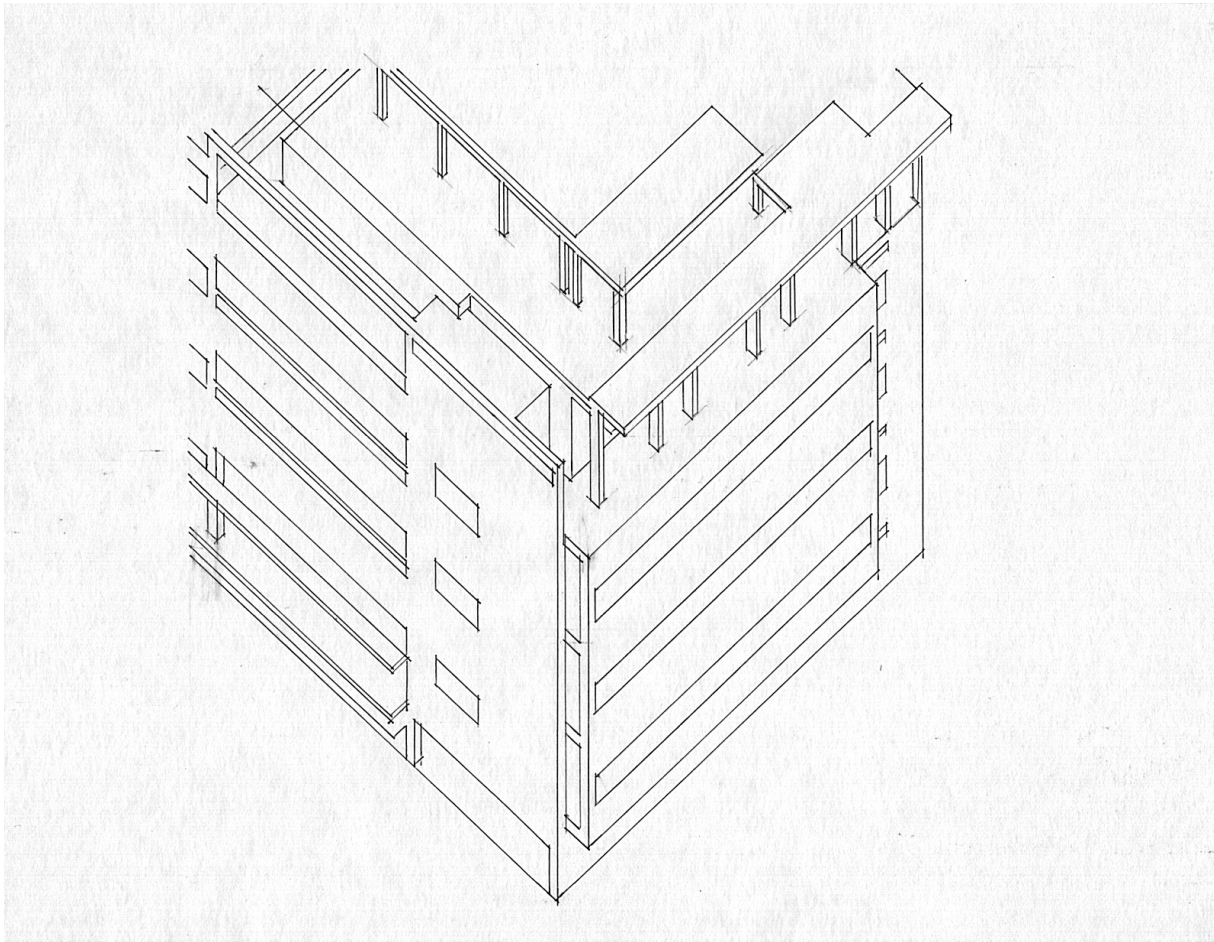
Let's start with the first change. To expand on the role and function of design as thinking, and different modes of thinking architecturally, one of Eisenman's significant contributions is to put various modes of architectural thought on display. He does this by differentiating between work as an architect versus thinking as an historian or academic theoretician (Eisenman, 2003a, pp. 9, 295; 2004, p. vii). The ideas and their contingent physical consequences that are at stake include reframing key aspects of the different sensibilities, objects, or process under examination. On the one hand, there is a condition delimited by ideas or ideals of «*origin, hierarchy, unity, sequence, progression, and continuity*», different from those of «*fragmentation, disjunction, contingency, alternation, slippage, and oscillation*» on the other (2003, p. 298). For Eisenman, there are consequences tied up here with a position that treats architectures as «*thought processes*» (2003a p. 300). This resonates with a general focus on processes (thinking through compositional strategies) and objects (projects and buildings).

The second change operates the notions of surface and space, or surface instead of space as the privileged realm of work. This emerges in the drawings which treat the north-east corner of *Giuliani-Frigerio* and specifically articulates a difference between the *Casa del Fascio* and the *Giuliani-Frigerio*. The former in one sense is all about space (carved, or eroded from an original whole) the later all about surface (flayed, layered). This is clearly shown in Eisenman's description of the *Casa Giuliani-Frigerio* as resisting a reading based on space categories and its surface-obsessed nature.

The third change of emphasis or orientation concerns perception, or the perceptual as a value that glides in over or under the conceptual. What is the relation of the critical text and the phenomenal, if any? It would be too simple to claim a reversal of the conceptual over perceptual position of the 1963 dissertation, though it may be worth examining such an idea if only briefly. Things are much more subtle and interwoven or simultaneous, both in relation to the physical figures and compositional moves in use, and in relation to the terms favoured to describe them.

To get a sense of an emerging interest in the phenomenal, listen to Eisenman on the problem and on what is at stake. This book, he writes, is «*attempting to articulate the consequences of objects that are also experienced in their physical displacements, the moving in and around of objects and spaces*» (Eisenman, 2003a, p. 300). A consequence of the approach can be seen in Eisenman's treatment of the northeast corner of *Giuliani-Frigerio*. Recall that he has already looked at the east facade and the north elevation of this building in the 1971 and 1984 articles respectively. Eisenman now focuses his energy on the corner itself.¹⁰ See figure 4.

10 Illustrations 268, 269, 271–273 (pp. 166–169) of the 2003a publication provide the cleanest illustration of the point of view and design questions at work.



This turn to perception marks a difference between the *Casa del Fascio* and *Giuliani-Frigerio*. If a reading of the former is framed to imbed or embrace a logic of accretion, of linear sequence and sequential time (this then that, before then after), the latter, says Eisenman, cannot be understood as informed by accumulation. There is, rather, a strong desire or recognition of the arbitrary or the ambiguous in this other form of perception, one described as «a perception of accretions contingent.. on the physical traversal... of a path that is never unique or hierarchical.» (2003a, p. 296)

Figure 4. North-East Facade Corner. *Casa Giuliani-Frigerio*, Giuseppe Terragni (after Eisenman, 2003, p. 166, illustration 269)

On the horizon, beyond or next to the three viewpoints or sensibilities we have become used to in *The Futility of Objects* – classical, modern, post-modern – a fourth sensibility appears. In *Terragni and the Idea of Critical Text*, that is, it appears Eisenman introduces a dimension more emphatically open to the phenomenal, to sensation and sensibility. Eisenman's closing discussion of the differences between a critical notation as compared to a gestural one suggests this future line of inquiry (2003, p. 299). This fourth practice is different from the compositional, transformational, and decompositional practices of its siblings and thus separate it from the others examined above.

3. Conclusion: An Open Ended Practice

... the Casa del Fascio as a diagram, but as a different kind of diagram than previous ideas of diagram. That is, it was no longer merely analytic, but also a template of possibilities.

(Eisenman, 2004a, p. 15)

3.1 Shifts – Reading Closely

The four texts discussed here engage critically with Terragni as a way to study different approaches to close reading in architecture. While the analysis has not demonstrated the existence of a single historical project or philosophy of history in Eisenman's texts, there are certain themes or characteristics revealed. If we accept their genre as «*polemical essays*», to take a methodological conclusion from *The Formal Method* (Eisenman, 1963, pp. 343–344) and thus see the writing projects aligned not as closed figures but as non-linear fragments of an open-ended theory, then we are allowed to develop several potential ways to summarise them, none cumulative nor chronological in kind.

One attempt at a synthetic treatment might try to read the texts as identical with design practice and the resulting architectural objects (whether building or project). The exercise would then be to track the shifts in point of view or thematic emphasis as they accompany Eisenman's contemporaneous design projects. This approach can be provisionally framed in the formula historical-analysis-equals-design, whether as a work on thinking or on form. But this is resisted, however, as ultimately too reductive, Eisenman's thinking positively slipping or skipping from one position to another. This is another instance of that oscillation discussed above, and a sign of an underlying ambiguity in his writing.

Two citations can be used to illustrate this, and both of them are intended to start to frame the overall force and direction of the texts examined, and thus return to the opening propositions of this paper. The two citations come from his seldom referenced article *The Big Little Magazine: Perspecta 12 and the Future of the Architectural Past* (Eisenman, 1969). It is a review of a special issue of *Perspecta*, a journal published since 1952 by the Yale School of Architecture. The special issue itself was concerned with the methods and practice of architectural history.

The first citation tightly states a relatively constant thematic assumption underlying Eisenman's historical effort. As Eisenman describes it's role, history is «*a vehicle for ideas*» (1969, p. 104). This status of historical practice as one of transmitting or perhaps creating ideas might go a way to help understand the relentless work of Eisenman on historical material.

The second citation from Eisenman's 1969 review is methodologically valuable in relation to the topics and design problems discussed in this

paper. It is a call for a more or less correct mode or method of analytical work in front of historical material from the discipline. In the course of Eisenman's review, he outlines not a methodology but some principles for doing the work of historical and critical analysis effectively. According to Eisenman, his writing aims to exemplify examples of «*historical phenomenon correctly subjected to an analytical process*» (Eisenman, 1969, p. 75). This correct approach to architecture's history is distinguished by three criteria: the quality and scope of drawings used in the analysis, a focus on the plan, and an approach which emphasises the relation of formal invention and ideas, that is the relations between form creation and underlying ideas.

3.2 Critical History

A different general summation of the historical project in Eisenman can be teased out of a more recent essay. Published in 2005 in an issue of *Perspecta* devoted to fame, and in the course of addressing the Mephistophelian question of the cost of fame, Eisenman provides further clues to the nature of his work on history.

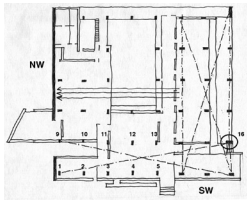
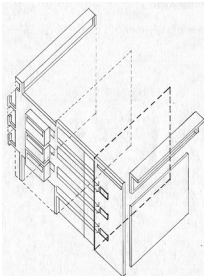
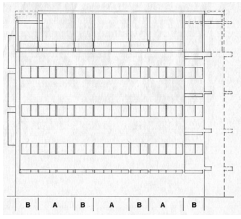
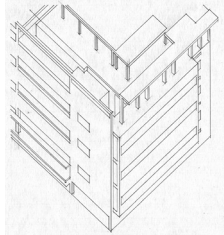
The comments emerge around his reflection on the limits of teaching. What, asks Eisenman, are the conditions of possibility for teaching architectural ideas? Eisenman believes that only certain architectural projects have the necessary «*disciplinary autonomy*» for them to work as instruments of teaching (2005, p. 165). To take one example, Borromini's projects according to Eisenman manifest a condition of disciplinary autonomy, one not present in the work of Bernini. This condition can be seen in Borromini's column/wall ambiguities. This state of autonomy allows Eisenman to teach Borromini, to engage in, that is, a critical reading of problems inside the discipline.

From this we can attempt to formulate, in the context of the ideas discussed in section two above, a formula of Eisenman's relation to historical phenomena. The four texts mark various approaches to what he describes as a critical history of architecture, one linked to the autonomy of the discipline (Eisenman, 2005, p. 171).

Taken in turn, the two key characteristics – that of critical history and of autonomy – provide a useful summary of assumptions underlying the historical project. Eisenman's decades-long efforts have contributed to establishing the conditions of possibility for such a history and give us several models of how such a critical history might function, which problems might surface within the discipline (such as column/wall oscillations), and what kinds of drawings and models might illustrate them.

3.3 A Common Denominator: Open Ended Theory

My survey of four texts suggest a commensurate range of approaches to historical reading in architecture, including key design elements, form

Shifts				
<i>Point of View, Themes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolute condition • Modernist sensibility • Object • Transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual • Formal universals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-modern • No future: only present and past • Impossibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical • Possibilities
<i>Composition Strategies, Devices, Effects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The column • Directional • Tension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambiguity • Cutting, Erosion • Layering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decomposition • Types • Whole, Fragments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indeterminacy • Inversion • Physical displacement
<i>Title of Text</i>	<i>The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture</i>	<i>From Object to Relationship</i>	<i>The Futility of Objects: Decomposition and the Processes of Difference</i>	<i>Terragni and the Idea of a Critical Text</i>
<i>Drawing</i>				
<i>Year of Publication</i>	1963	1971	1984	2003
	20 years		20 years	

Break

effects, and types of drawings. In table 1, I attempt to map the differences and in so doing set out certain general conclusions.

Table 1. Topics and Themes in Four Texts of Peter Eisenman.

Table 1 summarises, vertically, the point of view, key composition devices, spatial effects, and drawing type for each of the four texts, the latter displayed horizontally according to year of publication. One finding of the analysis suggested in Table 1 is the existence of a break in the mid 1980s, one hinged around Eisenman's relation to or use of time. Certain impossibilities appear in architecture, whether it is the exclusion or exhaustion of facts or ideas. The origin and impact of this impossibility – and the subsequent explicit turn to the possible in Eisenman's 2003 text – will be the subject of a future study.

The suggestion of two twenty-year clusters from the mid 1960's to the mid 1980's and the mid 1980's to the mid 2000's is overly neat but there is some evidence to support it. Eisenman's collected essays very roughly follow this periodisation. The first volume, *Inside Out* collects writings between 1963–1988, the second, *Written into the Void*, writings between 1990–2004 (Eisenman, 2004b, 2007). The track record of projects mapped in *Diagram Diaries* (Eisenman, 1999) more or less aligns with this division. Whether there is a parallel in the drawing modes or preoccupations is less clear.

If there is one common denominator in the essays under review, it is an opening of or to alternate sensibilities. As I suggested above, these alternate sensibilities differ from those derived out of part-to-whole relationships to take only one trait of what Eisenman has characterised as classical or modern sensibilities.

This is to return to the idea of open-ended theory that concludes *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*. There is some merit in returning at this stage to the 1963 thesis not only on grounds of method and intent but in terms of the content of historical analysis as a working on architecture's past. If we return to the beginning, we get a further sense of the role of Eisenman's approach to history, of his attitude toward «*history as an analytical and theoretical medium, rather than as a descriptive discipline*» (Eisenman, 1969, p. 74).¹¹

11 See also Eisenman, 1963, p. 343.

A non-synthetic project, the perpetual theory machine implied in 1963 I would argue is in motion all along. It is underlying all four texts, animating them with a force of constant oscillation. The citation that opens this section, written some forty years later, echoes this aim of historical work to serve as a «*template of possibilities*» for the future (Eisenman, 2004a, p. 15).

The historical writing project of Eisenman – at least as found in the four survey texts – can thus be claimed to mime over the decades the formal effects of *Giuliani-Frigerio* and its defining characteristics as described by Eisenman himself. As in his reading of *Giuliani-Frigerio*, in Eisenman's use of history there is no single privileged point of view; the four texts have a non-narrative relationship one to the other, with relations in constant oscillation; there is an absence of internal layering among or across the four texts.

This cumulative fact of a constantly open and potential future – of ideas and forms, of processes and of alternative possibilities both spatial and of general disposition – can be considered one of the most profound, productive, and creative effects of Eisenman's historical writing examined here.

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Figure credits

All figures are original drawings by the author based on diagrams in Peter Eisenman's published writing as follows:

Figure 1 after the diagram in Eisenman, 1963, p. 332.

Figure 2 after the diagram in Eisenman, 1971a, p. 53.

Figure 3 after the diagram in Eisenman, 1984, p. 77.

Figure 4 after the diagram in Eisenman, 2003a, p. 166.

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