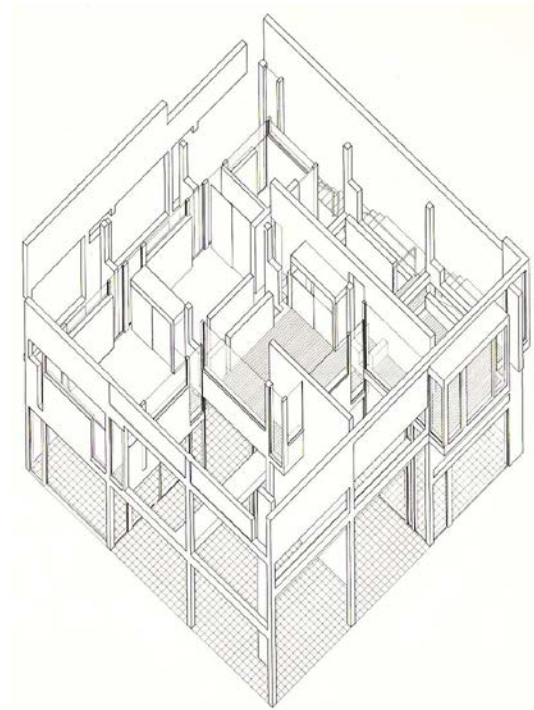


The Strategy of Displacement in Peter Eisenman works

Edited by Prof. Muammal Ibrahim

This essay is an attempt to discover the architectural displacement of Peter Eisenman works. It is no secret that the architecture of Peter Eisenman is difficult to grasp - let alone to see the big picture of his works at first sight. His journey through the world of architecture and philosophy is still ongoing and has seen lots of changes, twists, and bends. His architecture is often - if not always - referred to as *deconstruction*, while he initially started off on a different foot - one could say that the turn to a deconstruction architecture is an unseen, however, inevitably break with his earlier work. Due to the complex nature of his architecture and in the interest of this essay, I will mainly focus on his first works; the houses. As we will see, these houses (houses I - X) will be an intriguing journey on their own.



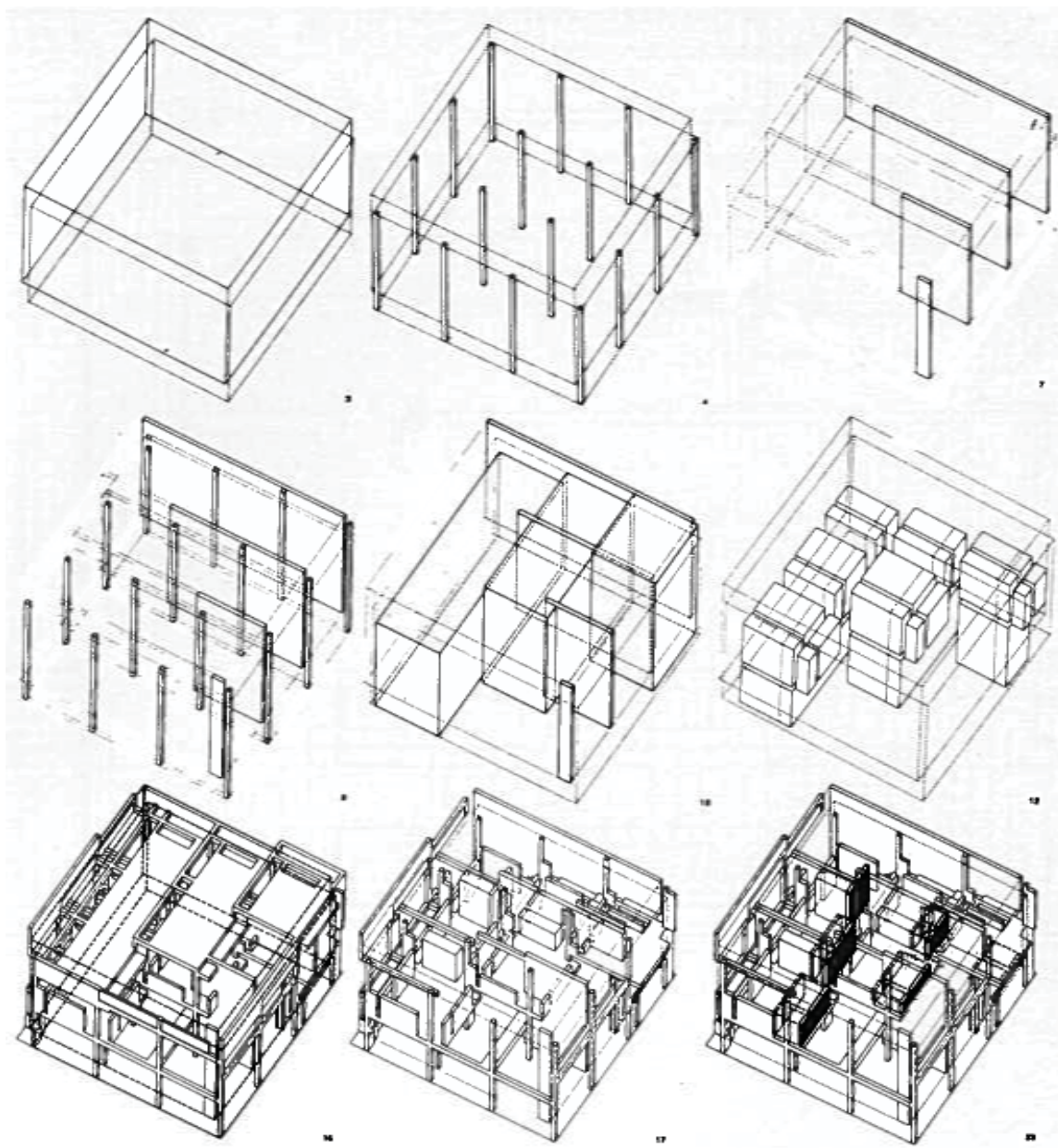


Image 1: House II -
axonometric projection

Image 2: House II -
Axonometric transformational diagrams

Theorizing Eisenman Displacement.

“Architecture is a representation of itself as construction responding to a purpose. forms are no longer a ‘means toward an end, but an end in themselves. The architecture of Peter Eisenman - especially that of the earlier houses (House I - IV) is based on the idea, even the conviction of an architecture that should be able to draw out the potential power from within the architectural configuration itself. This may sound complicated, but what he tries to do is to ‘unlink’ the function that architecture may represent from the appearance - form - of that same architectural object. Eisenman says that it is important to conquer the function and to purposely depict the function wrongly. He also says that “without function, there is no architecture.” This struggle between form and function is, of course, no stranger in architectural history, in the built environment, as well as in the theoretical architectural discourse.

Finding form is one of the essential themes that one can discover in the works of Eisenman and also what distinguishes him from other architects. In the process - in fact the process itself forms the process - he makes use of so-called displacement. These displacements are the building blocks of his designs and his way of thinking. They are in a way the soul of a building while remaining on the outer edge of the perceptual experience, the reference is the possibility of fact - it is not the fact itself. It can never be free of value or meaning, while it explains relationships in an architectural object, it is not isomorphic with it, unlike traditional forms of representation, the displacement as a generator is a mediator between a physical object, a real building, and what can be called architecture’s interiority. The displacement, therefore, can be seen as the motive for the building and at a general level, it combines the earlier described approach of form and his way of thinking informal laws within his architecture. “In each of the stages of displacement process in which the goal is to arrive at a set of shapes, that may or may not be present in the final design. The aim of the displacement process is to find a law, a general rule that will combine each of the partial moves or stages into a continuous uninterrupted sequence. This law of development is formal and should be independent of any functional interpretation. This way of thinking and actually describing the architectural displacement process as a general law. It influenced him in a way that further distinguishes him from other architects.

House II, he points to the fact that one should be able to see the house as an ordered whole, by going through the process of the displacement transformational in a reverse sequence, as to arrive at the pure, conceptual starting point of the rectangular box, that such buildings as ‘House II’ (1969) were explorations of basic formal syntax and the logical structure of space. The explicit and repeated use of his ‘formal language’ and the application of the diagram makes Peter Eisenman an interesting case when seen through the eyes. The application of the term ‘language’ and accompanying with it ‘style’. One can define language as the “simple elements of architecture and their use in construction, that language is constructed as a system of representation of the sense of buildings; we can say that it defines their identity, and at the same time it is a system of representation of a world of forms that has its own unity. Surely the architecture of Peter Eisenman qualifies for the ‘correct’ application of the term language; analyzing the houses results in distinct usage of particular architectural objects or elements, such as the beam, the column, the wall, the stairs, and the window. Also - as pointed out earlier - Eisenman makes use of forms that have their own unity. However, Eisenman’s architecture doesn’t pass the test for the usage of the term ‘style.’ Style and language are distinguished from each other by their varying degree of generality. Language can be based on a personal viewpoint, while style cannot. Style is shared

language. In order to become style it must be recognized by society. The style should not be confused with language; it should not be personal. Style, has to become a collective legacy in order to exist. Therefore the architect must aspire to define a style, but It is the community that recognizes whether he has achieved a style in his work. This is precisely the point where Eisenman's architecture becomes difficult, or complex, however Eisenman doesn't want to be recognized as a 'style'; instead, he continuously denies to be part of a style.

Displacement of form

The use of the displacement is a matter of a different kind; it involves many more aspects than there can be distinguished at first glance. The application of the displacement in the design (process) as well as defining the design process itself is something that is distinctive about Eisenman. However this statement does not have much content when compared with the history of the use of the displacement in letrcure , art and architecture, especially in post modern architecture.

Eisenman - have used the diagram displacement as a "formal taxis, or pattern, with its obsessive consistency, [it] is one of the means of making the world orderly, set apart from the universe where anything goes. Here two aspects stand out; first the strikingly similarities between the earlier described method of Eisenman, where he uses the displacement as a generator for the (initial) design and the description from the former quote. Also we found a resonance of the 'formal language' - as seen typical for Eisenman's work. What happens is unexpected and ambiguous; Eisenman has stated at the end of the classical: the end of the beginning, the end of the end that modern architecture did not succeed in breaking with the tradition of architecture where architecture always referred to something outside architecture itself. Considering form in its syntactic capacity, Eisenman sees it to be ordered accordingly to specific laws internal to architecture and not derived from notions outside itself Eisenman attempts to enclose all meaning within the form so that the meaning becomes intransitive. Thus we can see a clear statement of the (forming) Eisenman of his supposed 'break' with history. However, I think that in using a displacement approach - let alone let the displacement be the generator for the entire process - one always inevitably implicitly opens up the door for speculation. In this light a clear reference to the very era he wanted to distinct from emerges; the use of the displacement has always been intricately linked with (the elements of) nature. This is also an important moment, that architecture should contain analogies within its language; nature, technique, and history.

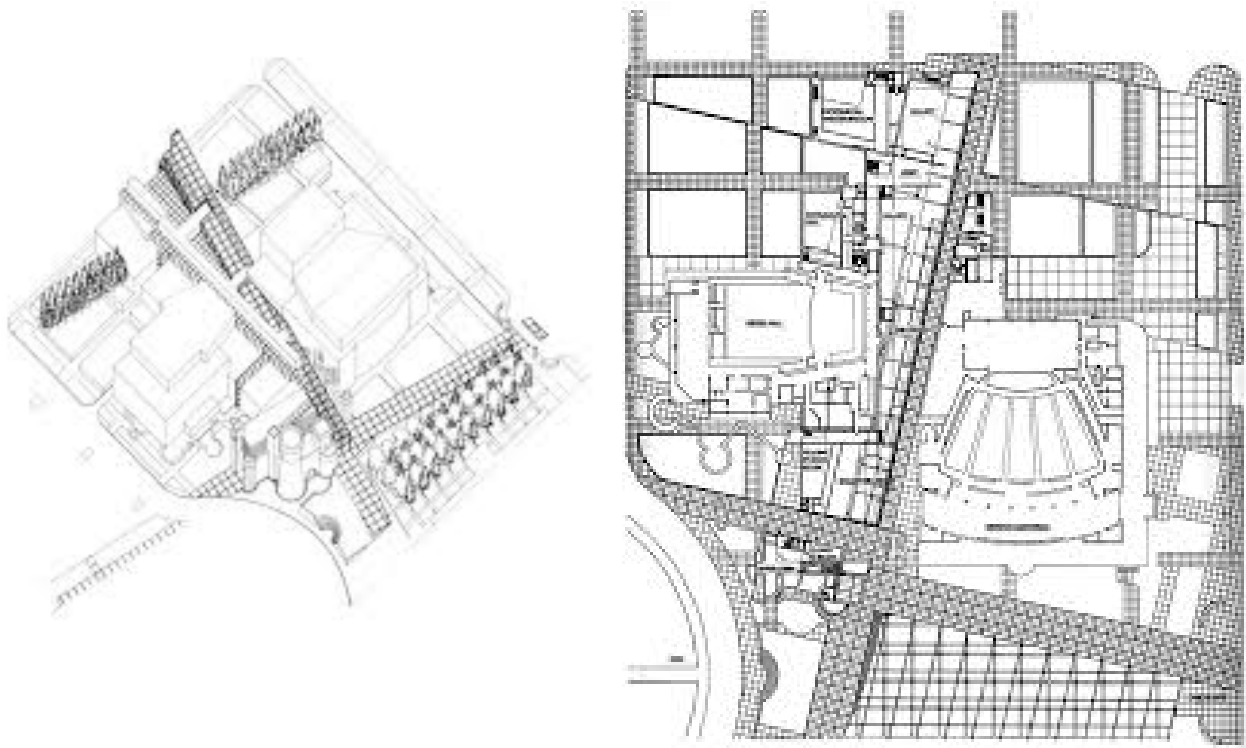
Eisenman does not use the displacement in order to create orderly patterns or in other words, 'readable' patterns for the untrained eye. Instead he creates somewhat of chaos or disorder. This clearly becomes apparent when we dig deeper into his composition where he makes a sudden change, although he continues his line of thought.

It is no secret that Eisenman always pushes the envelope and thereby going as far as he can in alienating the dwellers of his houses - in fact he even goes as far as to refer to them as intruders of the house. Also his way of dealing with the forces of nature i.e. the application of columns and stairs is distinctive, to say the least.

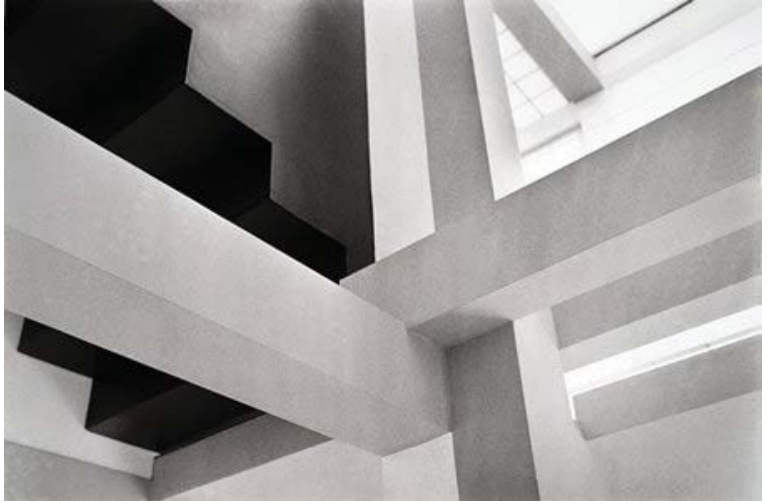
Estrangement of Displacement.

When we consider the Wexner Center (1989) we can see a column hanging, instead of standing firmly on the ground - a clear disregard for the force of gravity, thereby estranging the visitors who are confronted with this distorted image of reality. Also the use of the red stairs in House VI - of which the client, is somewhat odd; it is an upside downstairs, marked red, which functions only as to divide the building and provide the house with symmetry. These - and other - acts characterize the conception that Eisenman has about architecture - or at least what architecture supposed to be - and in fact his ideas about the world and reality of things.

Image 3:



the Wexner Center (1989)





The Wexner Center (1989)