# The Meta-Project, Eisenman, and Capital: Lessons for Critical Architectural Practice

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THEORY

ABSTRACT - *How does Peter Eisenman's conception of the meta-project relate to capital? Within much of the relevant discourse, the Eisenmanian ideal of achieving autonomy from politico-economic dynamics is underscored, with strict references to the notion of capital remaining absent from the literature. However in studying narratives articulated by Eisenman himself over the course of several lectures spanning several decades, a more integrated connection with capital begins to emerge—wherein Eisenman's conception of capital not only shapes later stages of the meta-project evolution but even seems to partially shape the anti-phenomenological position, anchoring it in its formative stages. These findings offer a distinct counterpoint to the Eisenmanian meta-project, both in terms of its efficiency at achieving distance from politico-economic dynamics and, more fundamentally, in terms of its presumed apolitical anchoring. However, far from being solely applicable to a scholarly niche, these discursive wrinkles offer contemporary practitioners a proactive theoretical framework for how to structure meta-projects to better resist contemporary capitalistic intricacies, and avoid the paths which led Eisenman's own meta-project being appropriated by dominant politico-economic dynamics.*

For Peter Eisenman, "practice" is set in opposition to "project," […] project critiques the status quo of the discipline and the world […] An insider-game, Eisenman's "meta-project" can only be advanced

successively through certain individual projects (commissions and buildings whether built or unbuilt), those whose parameters are such that the architect can resist or challenge specific, local demands. The architect's project should resist and avoid consumption by the normative constraints of the profession. (Marc Manack) [1]

Within the contemporary discourse of architecture, the concept of the metaphysical project, oftentimes simply shortened to project, is significantly interwoven with the *oeuvre* of Peter Eisenman. Both in terms of realized/unrealized projects, as well as academic texts, his body of work tends to be directly associated with the discursive landscapes of grammar and syntax, philosophy, linguistics, mathematics, literature, the notion of conceptual architecture, and psychoanalysis. The domain that is noticeably missing from this list is the discourse of contemporary political economics. While many of the above domains themselves are anchored around significant critiques of contemporary politico-economic systems, there does not appear to be any direct evidence that Eisenman's meta-project adopted or was shaped around such a politico-economic critique.

A lecture given by Peter Eisenman at the AA School of Architecture in 2010, titled "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity," however, appears to upend this politico-economic disassociation. Within this talk, Eisenman devotes a significant portion of his time to the politico-economic sphere—and more specifically to the growing impacts of capital and globalized capitalism upon architecture. What is meant by capital? Eisenman's definition of the term appears to be in line with the conventional Marxist lexicon. Namely, wealth accumulated via, and for the purposes of, continuous global circulation, and the perpetual buying and selling of commodities and labor. With no end or limit in theoretical sight, this "never-ending augmentation of exchange-value," leads to increased concentrations of accumulated wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer stakeholders, and inversely, the exacerbation and expansion of inequities within and upon a wider and wider population.[2] Tracing the relationship between capital and project over several eras, Eisenman frames the gradual digestion of project via the growing reach and intricacy of capital. Culminating in a reflection upon the impact of capital within his own meta-project, Eisenman concludes with the note: "At what point do you retire? […] I'm not convinced that we are any longer in control." [3]

Three questions emerge from this lecture. First, what are the details of Eisenman's conception of the relationship between architecture and capital? Second, is Eisenman's project significantly tied to capital in ways that have not previously been understood? In other words, is the consistent disassociation of Eisenman from politico-economic discursive domains inaccurate? Or is this lecture simply a tangential anomaly which can be discarded from the Eisenmanian discourse? Finally, third, are there lessons

that can be derived from Eisenman's framing of project that might be of use to contemporary architects attempting, in the context of late-stage capitalism, to sustain a long-term critical body of work?

BACKGROUND

Given the long-standing position of Peter Eisenman within the discursive landscape of architecture, there is an expectedly sizable quantity of literature focused upon his work and scholarship. At the time of writing this paper, a search for academic texts containing "Eisenman" in their titles produced 171 pieces relevant pieces of scholarship, excluding those directly authored by Peter Eisenman himself.[4] These pieces can be compartmentalized around four categories of focus: the formal and theoretical dynamics of the deep structure underpinning Eisenman's work (approximately 60% of texts); analyses of Eisenman which situate him within the broader discursive landscape of architecture history and theory (approximately 25%); pieces anchored around specific case studies (14%); and quantitative analyses of specific elements of Eisenman's *oeuvre* (approximately 1%). "Approximately" is the word to underscore here. The boundaries between these broader categories are not uncompromisingly rigid. For instance, pieces focused on the deep-structural aspects of Eisenman's work often utilized case studies within their writing to articulate certain points. Similarly, case study-focused pieces often localized themselves within a discursive landscape in order to situate certain extrapolations. What these meta-categories establish are simply the overarching or dominant points of focus being pursued within each piece.

The largest proportion of the discourse is focused on the intricacies of the deep-structural qualities embedded within Eisenman's work. These texts focus on "[Eisenman's] critical approach, presented as a process of emancipation from the conventional grounds and relationships defining the architectural form";[5] Eisenman's adoption of "a more self-consciously deconstruction mode of working" during certain parts of his career;[6] Eisenman's investigation of "the idea of presence and the representation of presence, as repressors of other interpretations and new meanings";[7] and so on. These texts in turn vary in how they approach this deep-structural subject, ranging from the lens of deconstructivism (approximately 12%), conceptual architecture (approximately 8%), diagrams (approximately 8%), physical/analog representation (approximately 7%), the digital domain (approximately 6%), autonomy (approximately 5%), the subject of traces (approximately 3%), psychoanalysis (approximately 2%), folding (approximately 2%), color (approximately 1%), and a multilayered approach combining two or more of the specializations aforementioned (approximately 48%).

The second largest macro-category of literature includes those pieces dominantly focused on situating the work, writings, and life of Eisenman

within the context of the broader lineage of architectural history and theory (approximately 25%). These texts focus on Eisenman's travels through Europe with Colin Rowe in the summer of 1960,[8] the collective portfolio of the New York Five,[9] Eisenman's work in relation to Bernard Tschumi and Greg Lynn,[10] and so on. The third largest category coincides with those texts dominantly structured around a case-study format (approximately 14%). A further breakdown of this pocket of the discourse unveils the following case-study subjects being the most prominent (in descending order): the Holocaust Memorial Berlin,[11] Eisenman's cardboard architecture houses,[12] La Ciudad de la Cultura,[13] the University of Phoenix Stadium,[14] the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts,[15] and so forth. Looking through the entirety of the discourse, there is a noteworthy scarcity on the overlap between the subject of capital and Peter Eisenman. It is within the framework of this discursive gap that this paper takes root.

METHODOLOGY

The primary source data analyzed through this research were extracted via the digital archives of the Architectural Association. Individual lectures were the points of focus, as opposed to panel discussions, round tables, and interviews. There were three assumptions underpinning these restrictions:

- Orators who give a series of lectures over a series of locations, oftentimes can recycle content from locus to locus without issue However, an orator giving a series of lectures, over an extended period of time, at a singular location, is more likely to try not to repeat themselves—particularly if the lectures are being recorded and archived. Keeping a stability of location allows for an increased likelihood of observing the evolution of a lecturer's articulated discourse over time.
- Keeping a stability of location also allows for the relative stabilization of an audience type (e.g., the students and faculty of the AA School of Architecture). Orators who lecture across different sets of listeners will often reshape content to accommodate the perceived (or actual) presumptions of the shifting audience type. Keeping the audience stable allows for shifts in lecture material to be more cleanly (but not entirely) attributed to the orator's own intrinsic reflections upon the state of their articulated discourse.
- A similar presumption pervades the reasoning for avoiding panel or group discussions, or interview formats. The nature of these non-singular formats may similarly impress certain extrinsic motivations upon a speaker. These motivations may lead to anomalous deviations of discursive content, set in motion by the speaker to satisfy actual or perceived group-think dynamics.

With these restrictions anchoring this investigation, a series of seven lectures which Peter Eisenman delivered at the Architectural Association across four decades became the point of focus for this paper:

- The 1975 lecture given within the Conceptual Architectural Symposium.[16]
- The 1989 lecture titled "Architecture and the Problem of the Weak Image." [17]
- The 1990 lecture given within the Symposium on the City.[18]
- The 1993 lecture titled "Architecture in the Age of Electronic Media." [19]
- The 1994 lecture given within the Architecture and Complexity Symposium.[20]
- The 2010 lecture titled "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity." [21]
- The 2012 untitled lecture simply archived under the title of "Lecture." [22]

## CAPITAL, ARCHITECTURE, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP

In his 2010 lecture, "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity," Eisenman spends nineteen minutes delving directly into the intricacies of the topic of capital—specifically into the evolution of the relationship between architecture and globalized capitalism over the past century.[23] These nineteen minutes equate to approximately 21% of the total lecture time. In this space, Eisenman breaks the evolution of the relationship into four phases—anchored around Le Corbusier, Mies Van der Rohe, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, and Rem Koolhaas. Within the first stage of the relationship between architecture and capital, the focus is placed upon the discursive framework set forth by Le Corbusier, and the ability of said framework to establish a critical separation from capital.[24] This separation – or "autonomy," to use a term that is oft-utilized within the discourse concerning Eisenman – is partly produced via the strength of the "meta-project" framework set in motion by Le Corbusier.[25] It is also partly a product of the times.

In this first stage, capitalism is still in a phase of relative global nascency. It is not yet fully ingrained within the intricacies of the discourse, practice, and discipline of architecture. It is unable to restrain or deform the rhetorical structure mobilized by Le Corbusier. This separation, while maintained for some time, gradually begins to lose its footing, leading to the second phase of the relationship between architecture and capital.

The post-war era up until the late 1960s encapsulates this second phase, with Mies van der Rohe highlighted as the key model for the state of the relationship. Three critical elements take shape here. First, capital expands its sway in scale and intricacy – extending further into the globe, and into finer-grained social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics. Second, modernism – once focused on the elevation of the public good, societal rights, and the rectification of societal inequities and ailments – takes a turn into the domain of heightened consumerism and comfort. Eisenman frames this as the shift from a focus on "good society" to "good life." [26] Finally, the corporatization and commodification of two areas of architecture are observed in this time.

The program which architecture is called upon to support achieves a more pronounced corporate quality (e.g., the Seagram Company being a multinational corporation, and the Seagram Building by extension being the headquarters of said corporation); and architects themselves become commodified as marketable brands and goods. A building by Mies van der Rohe becomes not just good architecture, but more marketable real estate due to the Mies brand. Despite the expanded sway of capitalism in this second stage, Eisenman asserts that Mies is still able to maintain a critical degree of separation.[27] Part of this separation though is due to the momentum of his career from the prior era. Capital is unable to significantly distort the grammar through which Mies' authorship manifests as a built-world condition. He is still able to practice with a significant level of critical distance from societal politico-economic dynamics, albeit not with the same scope of autonomy observed in the former Corbusian era.

> The Venturis, now twenty years, later can no longer transcend Capital. And Capital is not this encased condition, it is now moving into all sectors of meaningful architectural display and decorum. […] *Learning from Las Vegas* […] becomes an accommodation with Capital. [It] has to deal with Capital […] the duck and the shed become icons with this accommodation with Capital.[28]

In this third stage, taking place around the 1970s, the critical layers of architecture that once entertained significant levels of separation have now been appropriated via the outstretched grasp of capital. Capitalism has expanded, become more mobile, and extended its global and fine-grained reach. The notions of site and *genius loci* have lapsed from significance as the now-globalized and cross-scalarly entrenched spirit of capital, that is, the zeitgeist of this era, has taken the limelight as the critical influencer of the landscape of architecture.[29] *Learning from Las Vegas*, Eisenman asserts, is effectively a study of capital.

In the final stage, with the expanding reach and grain of capital, the appropriation of architecture takes on a further level of intricacy and depth. Capital so thoroughly digests the discourse of architecture (and inversely, architecture has so thoroughly internalized the discourse of capital), that discursive seats of power are now occupied by conceptual frameworks focused on capitalistic areas of marketing, branding, and the rapid, superficial consumption of architecture. "Signage has become a thing in itself," Eisenman asserts.[30] The *genius loci* versus zeitgeist discussion is no longer in operation. Rather, it has been replaced by a discourse of branding.

> What happens then in the 90s is that Rem and others are confronted with marketing, branding, all kinds of things that are the [last] phase of what I would call Late Capital. […] surface is the latest accommodation with Capital […] either they are decorated ducks, or there's no longer any decorated sheds, it is just pure decoration.[31]

As a whole, this four-stage evolution of the relationship between architecture and capital is the primary focus of this 2010 lecture. In the remainder of the time, Eisenman narrates, with distress and humor, the contemporary difficulties he is encountering within the context of his own meta-project's growingly lopsided relationship with the various dynamics of global capitalism. He ends with the query: "At what point do you retire? […] I'm not convinced that we are any longer in control." [32]

THE EISENMANIAN PROJECT, CAPITAL, AND A MIRROR

Eisenman returns to the AA School of Architecture in 2012. In this subsequent talk, the word "capital" does not emerge once. This is a trend in line with the other six Architectural Association lectures examined. Therein, Eisenman does touch upon topics related to global capitalism, including the impacts of finance upon project development; the impacts of media and branding upon the practice and experience of architecture; societal hierarchies, having upper-class clients, and so forth. However, within these other lectures he does not directly reference capital or capitalism—not on any single occasion.

How can Eisenman's 2010 lecture then be understood? Is it an anomaly within the discourse to be discarded as a casual tangent, or is something else at play? In his subsequent 2012 return to the Architectural Association, Eisenman refers to his lecture as a much-needed therapy session. The key to critical psychoanalysis, he frames as follows:

> My psychiatrist always used to say, "What we want to talk about, are all of those things you don't want to talk about. In other words, the things that you want to fool me into thinking are problems […] I really want to know what you don't want to tell me." In other words what was inside me, hot, and making me anxious. [33]

Throughout most of Eisenman's talks, there is a clear positioning of his body of work against the "phenomenological project." [34] Yet throughout all of these lectures, even within the 2012 address wherein this subject reemerges, Eisenman seems quite resolute in his efforts. He never concedes the potential of defeat in the face of the reemerging derivatives of the phenomenological project. By contrast, in 2010, when he proclaims a significant degree of powerlessness and loss of control in the face of capital, it is at this point that that the most unexpected question concerning retirement arises.

If Eisenman's own depiction of critical psychoanalysis is taken into serious consideration, then his in-depth, personal, and seemingly uncharacteristic lecture two years prior should not be discarded as a discursive anomaly. Rather, what it may indicate is that the anti-phenomenological positioning of the Eisenmanian project may be better placed under the "[what] you want

to fool me into thinking [is a] problem" category, whereas his meta-project's growingly lopsided relationship to capital may fall under the "what was inside me, hot, and making me anxious" [35] category.

Eisenman's clearly articulated framing of architecture's growingly lopsided relationship with capital across the twentieth century, may be best understood as a micro-variety of psychoanalytic transference. For while Eisenman does express exasperation over the loss of control over his own project, he cannot quite vocalize the details of the path that led him there. As a substitute discursive vessel, Eisenman focuses his analytical eye on the state of architecture at large, lamenting the devolving relationship between twentieth-century architecture and capital. This is done as a substitute for the analysis and articulation he cannot mobilize with regard to his own meta-project's growingly lopsided politico-economic associations.

This narrative is in fact partially supported in the 2010 lecture itself. As Eisenman expresses frustration over the state of his own contemporary work, the powerlessness and loss of control he articulates is significantly akin to that which he ascribes to the relationship between architecture and capital within the Koolhaasian era. The question that remains is whether a look back upon Eisenman's own meta-project via his lectures, unveils comparable earlier stages of the relationship between architecture and capital? In the first lecture given at the Conceptual Architecture Symposium in 1975, Eisenman spends most of his oration discussing the intricacies of the rhetorical deep structure underpinning his approach to conceptual architecture. He confirms a stern detachment from contemporary global socio-political dynamics, and with due resolve underscores that for him, the sole area of interest is competence – i.e., the well-crafted execution and refinement of said rhetorical deep structure.[36]

> [Eisenman speaking:] I don't have any commentary about middle-class second houses, or upper-middle-class second houses, or radical professors who build second houses on two-hundred acre sites while pretending to be North Vietnamese supporters; I don't know about conspicuous consumption. I don't have anything to say about those things. […] I'm only concerned with competence.
>
> [Moderator speaking:] And clients who can afford to build your houses.
>
> [Eisenman speaking:] Ahh… I guess [inaudible].[37]

Here, the Corbusian stage of the relationship between architecture and capital is clearly at play. As the question and answer regarding the clientele behind his work indicates, it is understood that the financial structures underpinning Eisenman's *oeuvre* are pronouncedly coming from points of higher affluence within the global socioeconomic system – i.e., clients

who can afford to build [his] houses. However, at this moment in time, Eisenman frames the resources of his clients effectively as a resource to be extracted, harvested for the purposes of setting in motion the autonomous meta-project; the meta-project which lies under his complete authorship, effectively insulated from the influence of the clients underwriting its manifestations in the built world. By the time of the next Architectural Association lecture, "Architecture and the Problem of Weak Image" in 1989, this relationship has shifted. The insulation of Eisenman's authorship over the meta-project has begun to partially lose its seal. While Eisenman still appears to have significant control over the reins of the project, his work (and he himself as an architect) is beginning to be transformed into a marketable product suitable for consumption via points of power within the growing network of capital.

> What happened was, one of the Board of Trustees of Carnegie Mellon was a developer in Pittsburgh who said "Holy God this [the Carnegie Mellon Research Institute] is wild. I want one of these buildings too." […] We said, "Look Mr. Lewis, we love you, and it is really nice that you want to build one of these, but you can't afford this." He said, "No, no, no, I can afford it. I want to try it. I know that […] this is something people are going to be very excited about." [38]

There are a few points to underscore within this quote.
First, there is a pronounced commodification of Eisenman's work. The noted developer wants to pursue the replication of the Carnegie Mellon Research Institute – that "wild building" – as a product that will entice the intrigue of the public and potential future tenants. He vocalizes that he "wants" (a copy of) the product, not on the basis of its architectural merit, but rather on the merit of its consumability.
Second, is the corporatization and exchangeability of program. The developer is requesting that Eisenman take an architectural work produced specifically as an academic research institute and simply replicate it as leasable office space.[39] The shift in program does not lead to a significant shift in architecture. Neither does the shift in site. The "wild building" is simply replicated in full for the new proposed site and program.

These dynamics clearly point to the Miesian phase in operation. While Eisenman still has control over the authorship of the meta-project, it does not function with the same level of insularity as observed in the Corbusian phase. Eisenman has not only accepted the consumability of the products of the meta-project, but has allowed for that consumability to impact how the meta-project manifests in the built world – i.e., in copy+paste format. A key dynamic of the Venturi-Brownian phase also appears to be seeded here with the collapse of the significance of *genius loci*, as a shift in locus does not trigger any shift in the architecture being produced. Given that the Carnegie Mellon Research Institute and the spin-off development were seemingly being designed for the same city, however (as opposed to being designed

for different countries), there is some allowance that can be granted that this dynamic has not quite achieved full maturity.

By 1993, Eisenman's meta-project has been thoroughly propelled into the Venturi-Brownian phase. Here, the "project" actively embraces and engages in discussion with the phenomena and zeitgeist of capital.

> That slide I showed with the lasers. […] Architecture as event, we haven't really come to terms with how you deal with the rock concert, the rave movement, and how that is integrated. That is, sound, light, color, movement […] how they become integrated into physical environments. […] One of the great challenges to me is the shopping mall. […] Disney world is a really interesting thing, because it truly is a mediated environment.[40]

Here, Eisenman's framing of the meta-project, rather than achieving a discursive and practical separation from the dynamics of capital, has become refocused as the study and, by extension, a manifestation of the dynamics and phenomena of capital. The project has become the "accommodation with Capital" that Eisenman had attributed to *Learning from Las Vegas* in the Venturi-Brownian phase,[41] with capital effectively taking over the philosophic arguments at play.[42]

At this point, Eisenman has also become acutely aware of his growingly lopsided relationship to media, branding, and marketability.

> Media has in fact turned architecture into what it is. I am here, because I happened to be mediatable. Not necessarily because I do interesting architecture or good architecture. And if you merely do what you do ordinarily, the media chews you up and spits you out, and needs something new all the time. […] The career that you sustain and develop is totally dependent upon media.[43]

This commodification and consumability of the architect, as well as the architect's *oeuvre*, is of course an extension of the dynamics previously observed in the Miesian phase. However, here, capital has reached a much more thorough and intricate grain of control over the trajectory and nature of the meta-project – incidentally echoing the words of Adorno and Horkheimer put forth decades prior:

> It is still possible to make one's way in entertainment, if one is not too obstinate about one's own concerns, and proves appropriately pliable. Anyone who resists can only survive by fitting in. Once his particular brand of deviation from the norm has been noted by the industry, he belongs to it as does the land-reformer to the capitalist.[44]
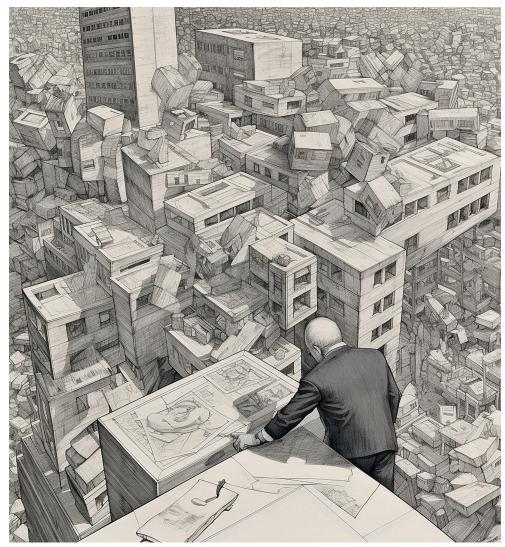
Figure 1. Eisenman being devoured by Capitalism (generated by AI).

The final Koolhaasian phase emerges in Eisenman's 2010 lecture, "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity." Eisenman here appears to be in clear understanding of his and his meta-project's appropriation and digestion by capital. The autonomy, the critical detachment from capital noted in the Corbusian stage, has completely degraded here. The client is not a simple extractive resource used to mobilize the insulated meta-project. The relationship has become inverted. Eisenman's meta-project is now a resource that capital extracts from, distorts, and alters, to fuel its own continued churn.

> We architects become prisoners of globalization […] People don't hire me because I'm a good architect. They hire me, they think, because I'm good media. We just got a 40-story tower […] I don't want to do a 40-story tower [there]. […] We should be doing six-storey housing. And the site is big enough, we could do all of the

housing on six stories. But the client has said, 'No, no, no we want to make a statement […] And so, we're doing a 40-story tower. Is this the end of Peter Eisenman? […] It could be. But since none of my colleagues worry about that sort of thing, I'm not going to be the only one. […] At what point do you retire? […] I'm not convinced that we are any longer in control.[45]

Eisenman's mourning of the devolving relationship between architecture and capital, as expressed in his 2010 lecture, quite clearly is mirrored by his dismay concerning the relationship of capital to his own meta-project. The Corbusian, the Miesian, the Venturi-Brownian, and the Koolhaasian stages which Eisenman frames across the timeline of twentieth-century architecture history, are in turn mirrored in his own meta-project's evolution over the years. These commonalities, in conjunction with Eisenman's anomalous retirement question arising in the singular lecture in which he delves into the subject of capital in full force, suggests that the 2010 address, far from being a discursive anomaly, is a significant new wrinkle to the Eisenmanian discourse. The critical importance of the 2010 lecture also produces an interesting byproduct. Namely, it invalidates Eisenman's reaffirmed anti-phenomenological positioning in his 2012 lecture, or any such positioning that comes after that time. For by his own critical analysis vocalized in 2010, the decades-old phenomenological and anti-phenomenological polarities within architecture have effectively been overcome and subsumed via capital. They are no longer in operation, and can thus no longer form the basis of a critical meta-project.

FUNCTION, PHENOMENA, AND TAFURI

The discursive landscape has broadly relegated Peter Eisenman and his work to non-politico-economic domains. This is a discursive positioning that Eisenman himself helped author. However, the depth and detail to which Eisenman frames the evolving relationship between architecture and capital in his 2010 lecture, indicates that he is not only quite well versed with the intricacies of global capitalism but quite conscious of the relationship between global capitalism and his own discipline. Are there other layers to Eisenman's meta-project that connect to capital that have been overlooked?

A point of focus for Eisenman that reemerges across all the lectures examined is his critical refutation of phenomenology. In 1975, for instance, Eisenman posits the conceptual as a distinct counterpoint to the phenomenological domain:

> I am trying to produce an object whereby you have a physical experience A […] but out of that physical experience, you begin to get a concept, an idea which has nothing to do with that physical experience. In fact, it is conceived of from a totally different attitude.

And the only way you can truly understand the concept is to be in a relationship with the object which can never be physical. In other words, the conceptual structure is designed from a point where you can never physically experience it. You physically experience the object, you put together the conceptual structure. Then, when you go back into the object, my premise […] or at least my intention is that the physical experience is then modified. […] [this is] something which for me, is conceptual.[46]

Thirty-eight years later, Eisenman still echoes this point:

My work, and the work of many architects, stands against the possibility of meaning from actual phenomena. That is, meaning from its materiality, etc. […] So it is purposefully going right at the phenomenological project of site specificity, *genius loci*, that in the site is some idea of a transcendental condition. […] And I would argue that from the first consciousness of architecture, the idea of real being is always to be put into question by architects. That is, to disturb the easy idea that the subject and object relate to one another on a *prima facie* basis.[47]

At certain moments, the critique is more blunt – e.g., "What many people are doing is designing buildings to be taken as photographs, rather than real buildings." [48] And at certain moments, Eisenman also asserts a comparable stance against the idealization of functionality.[49] Taken in tandem, this critique of pure phenomenology and pure functionality appear to echo the stance of Manfredo Tafuri, who asserted that capital's appropriation of architecture and the city would produce two outcomes, masked as opposing polarities, but in fact functioning as two sides of the same coin—the radical top-down reorganization of the city as capitalist machine at large, epitomized by Le Corbusier's proposal for Algiers, and the emergence of the hyper-commodified and hyper-phenomenological urban environment, epitomized by Carnaby Street.

Thus two levels of intervention within the unified city must be distinguished: the cycles of production and consumption. […] Carnaby Street and the new utopianism are thus different aspects of one phenomenon. Architectural and super-technological utopianism; the rediscovery of the "game" as a condition for the public's involvement […] invitations to establish the "primacy of the imagination": such are the proposals of the new urban ideologies.[50]

A significant overlap emerges between Eisenman and Tafuri within the timeframe of the latter's vocalization of this critique. Eisenman underscores the 1960s and 70s as a critical epoch within the maturation of his discursive worldview, specifically in the context of the polarization of the discursive camps concerning phenomenology and *genius loci* on the one hand, and

zeitgeist on the other. The year 1963 is critical within this timeframe, as it is at this time that Eisenman completes his doctoral dissertation, *The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture*, but not before he first reads the initial 1963 publication of Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Intentions in Architecture* [51] which, Eisenman asserts, behaves as a significant foil for his own maturing ideas. A second critical event within these years is Eisenman's inclusion in the Tafuri-sponsored "Ten Projects for Cannaregio" exhibition, which Tafuri structured as a refutation of the phenomenology/*genius loci*-focused *Roma Interrotta* exhibit of 1978. Given Tafuri's overt tie of the anti-phenomenological stance to an anti-capitalist positioning, the Cannaregio exhibition's questioning and critique of the phenomenological project is clearly significantly anchored around a critique of capital.

The critical question here is whether the specificities of Eisenman's positioning against the phenomenological project, within the 1960s and '70s, stretch into the current day. Or whether his discursive stance during that time period was simply insular to that era. In his own framing of his anti-phenomenological positioning, in his 2012 lecture, Eisenman indicates an unbroken discursive thread from his initial reaction to Norberg-Schulz, to his inclusion in Cannaregio, to his latest positioning against the second revival of phenomenology under the domains of digital processes and self-organizing parametric systems.[52] For Eisenman, these occupy the same lineage of discursive thought that can be traced without break from 2012 back to 1963.

Eisenman's 2010 lecture at the Architectural Association, "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity," further supports this conception of discursive continuity across the past decades. He first frames the evolution of the *genius loci* and zeitgeist debate across the twentieth century, starting with Walter Gropius and ending with Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi,[53] and then immediately ties this timeline, without any buffer, into an analysis of the evolution of the relationship between architecture and capital, starting with Le Corbusier and ending with Rem Koolhaas.[54] For Eisenman, the continued conflicts between the *genius loci*/phenomenology project on the one hand, and the zeitgeist project on the other, offer an unbroken narrative of twentieth and twenty-first century architecture. Furthermore, this narrative is deeply intertwined with the narrative concerning architecture's relationship to capital. For Eisenman, these are the critical narratives of architecture in the modern era. Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, for instance, are not only critical figures pursuing the continuation of the zeitgeist movement,[55] but in so doing, are figures shaping formulations concerned with "the emergence of Capital as a phenomenon in culture, in media, in the arts, and in architecture." [56]

## CAPITAL, AUTONOMY, THE CRITICAL PROJECT

Eisenman and capital – is there a relationship here that has been overlooked? Aside from the 2010 lecture, Eisenman ventures into the topic of capital with brief and passing statements. Although he does often speak of media, branding, client-architect relations, the relatively higher-budget nature of his works, the spectacle of modern society, etc., on a surface level, it is quite difficult to extrapolate that these are politico-economic commentaries directly targeting capital. Rather, they appear to be cultural commentaries inspecting the phenomena generated by capital in the modern era. Being avowedly interested in architecture as a "conceptual, cultural and intellectual enterprise," [57] the absence of a discursive association of Eisenman with the politico-economic domain is to be expected. How then, can the seemingly anomalous discursive point, the politico-economically charged 2010 lecture given by Eisenman at the AA School of Architecture, be understood?

Perhaps Eisenman does not have a significant tie to the subject of capital, and this is simply a tangential aside. The written discourse of architecture would seem to support this assertion. Based on the extensive literature reviews conducted, the terms "Eisenman" and "Capital" rarely, if at all, appear together. The discourse concerning Eisenman and his *oeuvre* occupies a wide range of academic umbrellas, but that of politico-economic structures is not one of them. If it is the case that there is effectively no relationship, then the time Eisenman spends speaking on the subject within this Architectural Association lecture must be construed as that – as an aside, as a tangent from the interests dominantly attributed to him via the discourse, for example, grammar, rhetoric, linguistics, the questioning of the primacy of phenomenological approaches to architecture, etc.[58] What this paper attempts to frame is the vulnerability of this position.

For Eisenman, there is an unbroken discursive thread that can be traced through the phenomenological and anti-phenomenological meta-projects of the twentieth and twenty-first century. In Eisenman's own anti-phenomenological timeline, this thread starts in his reading of Norberg-Schulz in 1963, his inclusion in the Cannaregio exhibit in the 70s, all the way to his reaffirmed positioning against the phenomenological project in his 2012 lecture at the Architectural Association. Second, for Eisenman, the phenomenological and anti-phenomenological thread within twentieth-century architecture is deeply entangled with the relationship between architecture and capital over the past century. Eisenman's stance against the idealization of pure phenomena as well as against the idealization of pure function, mirrors Tafuri's own rejection of these domains, as exemplified by his critique of Carnaby Street and Le Corbusier's proposal for Algiers. For Tafuri, the phenomenological and functionalist projects within architecture serve as the rearguard of capital, while being dressed as the critical avant-garde.[59]

Eisenman's own detailed 2010 analysis of the growingly lopsided relationship between architecture and capital frames how both the phenomenological and anti-phenomenological camps were in effect subsumed by capital. In this light, in the current day, the phenomenological and anti-phenomenological project is no more; there is only capital, its phenomena and spirit, for architecture to negotiate and contend with. With the subsuming of the phenomenological and anti-phenomenological project via capital, Eisenman's reaffirmed stance, in 2012, against the phenomenological project can be seen as an entirely superficial and futile positioning. It is a discursive stance which actively circumvents Eisenman's own deep-structural anxieties as expressed in 2010, and serves as a further assimilation of the Eisenmanian meta-project by capital.

From this narrative, two key takeaways emerge for the critical project of the contemporary day. First, the Tafuriian notions of the phenomenological, anti-phenomenological, and functionalist projects appear to no longer be in play. Capital has overcome and appropriated these expired polarities. Any attempt at formulating a critical meta-project around these invalidated poles will simply be a manifestation of the Tafuriian "rearguard dressed as avant-garde" position against capital. In this light, Eisenman's re-adoption of the anti-phenomenological stance in 2012 places him in this very role.

Second, Eisenman's formula for autonomy has not functioned as expected. Within his initial conception of "project," Eisenman avoided establishing clearcut, overt, and solidified politico-economic positions. These politico-economic layers were likely omitted from the conception of the meta-project with the assumption that doing so would grant greater autonomy from the fettering dynamics of contemporary society, and in doing so, grant the architect and the meta-project a critical gaze. This initial position of dissociation from the politico-economic sphere, while not formally articulated as such, appears to be an extension of the concepts of criticality via autonomy as vocalized by Adorno and Horkheimer years prior.[60]

In sight of the critical and subsequent post-critical debates of late-twentieth and twenty-first century architecture, this finding is of some use. Namely, it indicates that the notion of autonomy at the heart of the critical project may have been a fundamental flaw within its deep structure. The project has an unavoidable politico-economic voice; and if the architect refrains from shaping it, the voice is not discarded, but rather left blank to blindly absorb (and be absorbed by) the dominant ideological structures around which it is situated.[61]

An approach which may help to resolve this deep-structural issue, is to adopt not only a specific politico-economic positioning at the fundaments of the meta-project, but to attempt to circumvent the commission-based model of the practice of architecture which so readily ties the profession to a short- and long-term entanglement with the overpowering dynamics

of marketing and commodification. The architect-developer model for instance, which necessitates the architect to have skin in the game, but also grants the capacity to shape the ethics, program, financial structure, as well as politico-economic specifics of the meta-project and its various built-world manifestations much more readily, appears to be one such alternative pathway worthy of investigation.

## Notes

1. Marc Manack, "Practice as Autonomous Object," *The Plan Journal* 0, no. 0 (2016): 49.
2. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (London: Pelican Books, 1976), 247–57.
3. Peter Eisenman, "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 02 May 2010): 38.
4. For the purpose of replicability, this search was conducted via Google Scholar Excluding citations, a search for texts containing "Eisenman" in the title, produced 323 results. Excluding works that were authored by Peter Eisenman himself, texts relating to other persons named Eisenman and articles that were duplicates but written in different languages, resulted in 171 relevant texts related to Peter Eisenman.
5. Anton Danailov, "The Emancipation of the Intermediary: The Other Reality of the Architectural Form in the Work of Peter Eisenman," *Visual Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019): 102–07.
6. Thomas Patin, "From Deep Structure to an Architecture in Suspense: Peter Eisenman, Structuralism, and Deconstruction," *Journal of Architecture Education* 47, no. 2 (2013): 88–100.
7. Edea Garcia "Peter Eisenman and Other Architecture: Of the Arabesque and Grotesque" (Ph.D. diss., Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, 2019).
8. Peter Eisenman and Colin Rowe, "Interview with Peter Eisenman: The Last Grand Tourist: Travels with Colin Rowe," *Perspecta* 41 (2008): 130–39.
9. Rosemarie Bletter, "Reviewed Works: Five Architects. Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 38, no. 2 (1979): 205–07.
10. Jose Esquroz, "Las dimensiones del tiempo en las estrategias arquitectónicas contemporáneas 1978–1995 Eisenman-Tschumi-Lynn" (PhD diss., Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2011).
11. Johan Åhr, "Memory and Mourning in Berlin: On Peter Eisenman's Holocaust-Mahnmal (2005)," *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 28, no. 3 (2008): 283–305.
12. Mark Major and Nicholas Sarris, "Cloak-And-Dagger Theory: Manifestations of the Mundane in the Space of Eight Peter Eisenman Houses," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 28, no. 1 (2001): 73–88.
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14. Todd Gannon, *Eisenman Architects: Home Field Advantage: University of Phoenix Stadium* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).
15. Houssameldeen El Refeie, "Metaphysics and Identity in Architecture: Peter Eisenman's Wexner Center for the Arts as Case Study," in *Cities' Identity Through Architecture and Arts*, eds. Anna Catalani et al. (London: Routledge, 2018): 525–31.
16. Peter Eisenman, "Conceptual Architecture Symposium, Part 3" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 1975): 30.
17. Peter Eisenman, "Architecture and the Problem of the Weak Image" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 1989).
18. Peter Eisenman, "Symposium on the City, Part 2" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 1990).
19. Peter Eisenman, "Architecture in the Age of Electronic Media" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 1993).
20. Peter Eisenman, "Architecture and Complexity Part 3" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 1994).

21. Peter Eisenman, "Lateness and the Crisis of Modernity" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 2010).

22. Peter Eisenman, "Lecture" (lecture, Architectural Association, London, 2012).

23. Eisenman, "Lateness," 25–42, 70–72.

24. Eisenman, "Lateness," 40.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 25–27.

28. Ibid., 27–28.

29. Ibid., 28.

30. Ibid., 30.

31. Ibid., 28–30.

32. Ibid., 34–38.

33. Eisenman, "Lecture," 6–7.

34. Ibid., 30–35.

35. Ibid., 6–7.

36. Eisenman, "Conceptual Architecture Symposium," 30.

37. Ibid., 30–31.

38. Eisenman, "Architecture and the Problem of the Weak Image," 50–52.

39. Ibid.

40. Eisenman, "Architecture in the Age of Electronic Media," 98–100.

41. Eisenman, "Lateness," 27–28.

42. Ibid.

43. Eisenman, "Architecture in the Age of Electronic Media," 19–20.

44. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford CA, USA: California Press, 2002): 103.

45. Eisenman, "Lateness," 34–38.

46. Eisenman, "Conceptual Architecture Symposium," 3–4.

47. Eisenman, "Lecture," 30–35.

48. Eisenman, "Architecture and the Problem of the Weak Image," 60.

49. Ibid., 72.

50. Manfredo Tafuri, "Towards a Critique of Architecture Ideology," in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, 1998): 26, 30.

51. Christian Norberg-Schulz, Intentions in Architecture (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963).

52. Eisenman, "Lecture," 17–19, 31.

53. Eisenman, "Lateness," 11–25.

54. Ibid., 25–42.

55. Ibid., 23.

56. Ibid., 25.

57. Iman Ansari, "Interview: Peter Eisenman," The Architectural Review, 26 April 2013 - https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/interview-peter-eisenman.

58. Eisenman, "Conceptual Architecture Symposium."

59. Tafuri, "Towards a Critique of Architecture Ideology," 33.

60. Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

61. Howard Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010).

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