



# ARCHITECTURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

*Peter Eisenman and Jacques Lacan*

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## Introduction

The purpose of this book is to establish and analyze a relation between architecture and psychoanalysis, through the work of Peter Eisenman and Jacques Lacan. It examines the parallels and similarities between Eisenman's compositional strategies and theoretical premises and Lacanian linguistics and psychoanalysis. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate the importance of psychoanalysis as it can be applied to design strategies and theoretical premises in architecture, and to the reading of architecture, its analysis and criticism. The study involves an in-depth reading of Lacan, which includes a demonstration of the relation between the thought of Lacan and important philosophical traditions. The discussion incorporates issues of vision, perception, cognition and identity in relation to philosophy and visual studies.

The discussion includes analysis of the thought of figures such as Jacques Derrida, Noam Chomsky, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, Ferdinand de Saussure, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, Nicolas Cusanus, Proclus, Plotinus, and Plato. The structures of Lacanian psychoanalysis are seen in relation to the compositions of Eisenman themselves, and in relation to Eisenman's own references to linguistics and philosophy in his writing, to figures like Jacques Derrida and Noam Chomsky. Architectural precedents are analyzed in figures such as Leon Battista Alberti, Giulio Romano, Andrea Palladio, and Francesco Borromini from the Renaissance, and Le Corbusier, Giuseppe Terragni, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson from the twentieth century. The book proceeds more or less chronologically, analyzing the compositional strategies developed by Eisenman for architecture: the "transformational relation" and the "rhetorical figure" in relation to the linguistics of Lacan, strategies such as "decomposition" and "scaling" in relation to the domains of the Imaginary and Symbolic of Lacan, and strategies such as "blurring" and "diagramming" in relation to the domain of the Real of Lacan.

The book is intended for architects, artists, educators and students in art and architecture, and educators and students in philosophy and psychoanalysis. The hope is that the relation between architecture and psychoanalysis, as it is established in the book, would be applied to design strategies in architecture, analysis and criticism of design strategies, and the writing of criticism and theory in architecture, even to historical analysis. The conceptual framework which is developed is in direct relation to my own experience as a teacher in architectural design studio and architectural history and theory, as well as being a continuation of a conceptual framework which I have developed in previous publications, in the relation of architecture to philosophy.

I was a student of Peter Eisenman in Chicago in 1993, and an editorial assistant at *Any Magazine* in 1994, working with Cynthia Davidson and Michael Speaks. I was introduced to the work of Jacques Lacan in seminars given by Mark Linder in Chicago, and Joan Copjec and Hal Foster in Ithaca, New York. Since then I have written several essays analyzing the work of artists and architects in relation to theoretical and aesthetic approaches established in the writing of various contemporary philosophers: the work of Leon Battista Alberti in relation to the discourse of Nicolas Cusanus and Marsilio Ficino; Piero della Francesca in relation to Cusanus and Proclus; Francesco Borromini in relation to Cusanus and Athanasius Kircher; Guarino Guarini in relation to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz; Paul Cézanne and the Cubists in relation to the Platonic tradition; *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* in relation to Sigmund Freud; Frederick Kiesler in relation to Georges Bataille. These essays can be found in *Platonic Architectonics: Platonic Philosophies and the Visual Arts* (2004), *Architectural Forms and Philosophical Structures* (2003), and *The Relation Between Architectural Forms and Philosophical Structures in the Work of Francesco Borromini in Seventeenth-Century Rome* (2002).

The work of Peter Eisenman and Jacques Lacan has always played a role in the previous conceptual framework which I have developed, in the relation between architecture and philosophy, as there are many references to both figures throughout the essays. This study is a culmination of the previous work, as it addresses contemporary and future issues in architecture and philosophy, in the relevance of psychoanalysis to philosophy. The relationship between architecture and psychoanalysis has been the subject of lectures that I have prepared for classes and seminars over the last six years in Architecture Theory, History of Modern Architecture, History of Italian Rationalism, and Architecture Design Studio. It has also been the subject of conference

papers that I have delivered at the University at Buffalo, Binghamton University, University of Rochester, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, University of Leeds, Judson College, and Syracuse University.

I have benefited from the feedback of students during the course of the investigation; a few students who have stood out in the discussion are Ron Viola, Kyle Robinson, Melissa Vallincourt, Tim Ganetis, Tibor Martin, Emily Tracey, Kevin Kemp, Alex Diez, Andrew Bagge, Tom Taylor, Kevin Remillard and Peter Bartash. Other professors with whom I studied who contributed to the development of the conceptual framework include Douglas Garofalo, Mark Rakatansky, Catherine Ingraham, Stanley Tigerman, Robert E. Somol, Christian Otto, Geoff Waite, Anthony Vidler, and Hayden White.

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Chapter Two, “The Trope of the Transformational Relation,” analyzes Peter Eisenman’s reading of the architecture of Giuseppe Terragni, as he was influenced by the theories of Colin Rowe, in relation to the linguistics of Jacques Lacan. It focuses on the concepts of the transformational relation, and surface structure and deep structure from the linguistics of Noam Chomsky, and the concepts of the signifier and the signified from the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. It also discusses the concept of *différance* of Jacques Derrida, the play of signifiers, in relation to the *glissement* and *signifiance* of Lacan, the sliding of the signifier and the resistance of the signifier to the signified. It examines how the concept of the transformational relation can be applied to other compositional strategies in architecture, and how Lacan’s concepts of metaphor and metonymy can be applied to architecture.

Chapter Three, “The Rhetorical Figure and the Sliding of the Signifier,” examines Eisenman’s concept of the rhetorical figure in architecture in relation to the *signifiance* of Lacan, the mechanisms of signification in language. It examines further the *différance* of Derrida, involving the concepts of the

supplement and the trace, and the concepts of spacing and the graft in language and architecture.

Chapter Four, “Diagrams of the Imaginary and Symbolic,” examines the Lacanian concepts of the Imaginary (image formation and object identification) and Symbolic (language and the matrix of interpersonal relations) in the human psyche, in relation to architecture. It examines concepts of the “mirror stage” and ego formation, in relation to how language is structured and how architecture is perceived. It examines concepts of the Other, the symbolic matrix, and the other in interpersonal relations, in relation to the identity of the self in language, and how they are played out in architecture; and it examines the perception-consciousness system of Freud in relation to Lacan’s theories of the Imaginary and Symbolic.

Chapter Five, “Scaling and Dream Work,” focuses on the dream interpretation of Sigmund Freud in relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis and architecture, in design strategies such as scaling and decomposition. The relation between the dream thought and the dream image of Freud is analyzed, and in particular how they are related by linguistic mechanisms in the dream composition, which can be applied to architectural composition. The mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy are analyzed in particular, and the relation between dream analysis and the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. The chapter analyzes Eisenman’s concept of architecture as “text,” and considers his reading of the architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Chapter Six, “The Dream and the Text,” continues the analysis of the relation between dream interpretation and linguistic structures, and architectural composition, focusing on readings of architecture based on dream analysis, mechanisms of language in relation to dreams involving the Imaginary and Symbolic, and concepts of *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) from Saussure and Lacan. The chapter also considers theories of perception, and the mechanisms of the production of dream images of Freud in relation to linguistic mechanisms of Lacan, as they can be applied to architecture.

Chapter Seven, “Diagrams of Desire: The Real and the Gaze,” analyzes the Lacanian concepts of the Real (what is other than the Imaginary and Symbolic) and the Gaze in vision, in relation to Eisenman’s concepts of diagramming, folding, blurring, and the figural and interstitial in architecture. The chapter also examines Lacan’s concept of desire as defined in the mechanisms of language, in relation to architecture, and in particular the concept of the *objet a* (the unattainable object of desire), in the structure of desire as it can be seen in architecture. The Gaze is the key concept in La-

can's theory of vision, as vision is distinguished from perception, and in visual representation. Lacan's theories of vision and representation are analyzed as they are applicable to architecture. The concept of the Gaze is seen in relation to the "psychophysiological space" of Erwin Panofsky, and the "psychasthenia" of Roger Caillois. Lacan's concept of the Real is seen in relation to Eisenman's concept of "interiority" in architecture.

Having studied at Cornell University, with students of Rudolf Wittkower and Colin Rowe, my methodology is in part a product of Cornell School historicism, in the project of connecting disparate formal manifestations with underlying conceptual matrices. The methodology is also particularly influenced by the work done by Erwin Panofsky at the Institute for Advanced Studies, in the interpretation of formal manifestations in the arts in relation to the epistemological and philosophical structures of the cultures in which they were produced. Secondary sources on Lacan which I have found particularly helpful include *Logics of Disintegration* by Peter Dews; *Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change* by Mark Bracher; "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" by Fredric Jameson; *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan; "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other" by Anthony Wilden; *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan* by Joël Dor, and *The Title of the Letter* by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe.

I was a student in an advanced design studio of Eisenman's. The assignment was to design a building which looks irrational but in fact is the product of a completely rational design process. My solution (Figure 1), which took all semester to conceive, was to set up a series of permutations based on rotating a singular, consistent geometry, a zigzag, on axis at different scales (Figure 2). The composition thus entailed the overlaying of two formal systems, a device which Eisenman has used, at House I for example, and looking for the intersection of the systems. The conceptual model for the systems was cell reproduction. According to genetic scientists, cells reproduce themselves in patterns which are recognizable in mathematics and geometry, but there is always a kink thrown into the system, so that all biological entities are unique. Thus once the overlaying of the systems was established, the goal was to look for the possibility of a kink, something in the system itself which would throw the system off. This happened in the rotation of the zigzag around an axis. At one particular scale, and one particular point in the rotation, the size of the zigzag was not sufficient to maintain a constant proportion in the rotation (the space of the rotation was less than the size of the form), so the zigzag flipped, and the rotation continued in the opposite direc-