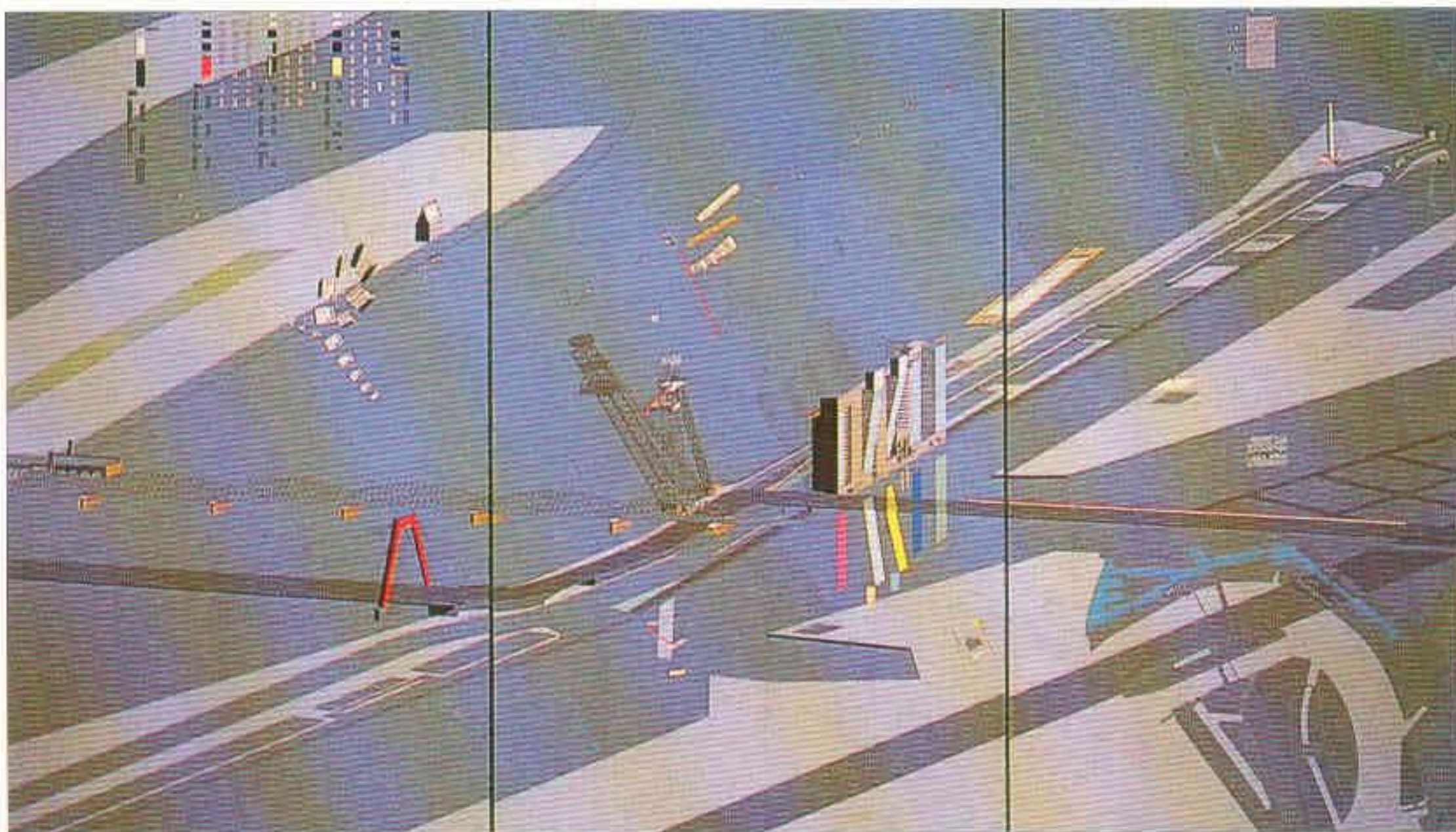


CHARLES JENCKS

Deconstruction: The Pleasures of Absence



OMA, BOOMPIES HOUSING PROJECT, ROTTERDAM

If there really is a 'Neo-Modern' architecture, as many architects and critics have been quick to claim, then it must rest on a new theory and practice of Modernism. The only such development to have emerged in the last 20 years – known as Deconstruction or Post-Structuralism – takes Modernist elitism and abstraction to an extreme and exaggerates already known motifs, which is why I would continue to call it 'Late'. But it also contains enough new aspects which revalue the

suppositions of cultural Modernism to warrant the prefix 'Neo'. 'New' or 'Late' – it is a matter of debate, and of whether the emphasis is on continuity or change: but the fact of a Deconstructionist movement in architecture has to be accepted. Reflecting changes in the literature of the 60s (Roland Barthes' 'death of the author' and, later, 'pleasures of the text') and changes in philosophy (Jacques Derrida's notions of critical 'deconstruction' and '*différance*'), the movement has been most comprehensively developed by Peter Eisenman as a theory and practice of negativity ('not-classical', '*de*-composition', '*de*-centring', '*dis*-continuity'). Eisenman, always on the lookout for linguistic and philosophical justifications for architecture, and having exhausted his use for Structuralism and Chomsky in the 70s, has tirelessly moved on from one metaphysics to the next, an indefatigable Ulysses in search of his non-soul, a wandering Modernist who has found momentary respite in Nietzsche, Freud and Lacan, before pushing on to further points of ennui and alienation. The Second World War, the Holocaust, the atom bomb, and any number of other inescapable horrors become for him, as they do for a hero in Woody Allen's universe, the essence of Modern life, the data to be represented in architecture. For some people nothing has more credibility than the Great Void and the seriousness with which certain New Yorkers pursue this *nihil* would suggest it is located near midtown Manhattan. But since architecture is supposed to be a constructive art with a social base, an architect who designs for emptiness and non-being is slightly humorous. Who's to say? A Deconstructive, anti-social architecture has as great a right to exist as the same traditions in art, literature and philosophy (as long as one builds it for oneself or a knowing client) and it should not come as a surprise that all are equally Mandarin. The

ultimate *différance*, Derrida's coinage for the 'difference that escapes language', the eternal unknowable and 'otherness', is the individual isolated from the group and now even removed from himself in schizophrenia. Although it may seem absurd to base building on this solipsism and scepticism, architecture always represents general cultural values, and no one will dispute that these are current, even fashionable, motives in the other arts. There is even an aesthetic, pleasurable side, a developed formal language which might be discussed prior to the theory: certainly the style of Deconstructive Abstraction preceded its intellectual formulation by Eisenman and others.

Frank Gehry and the Deconstructionist Style

Frank Gehry has developed the Post-Modern space of Charles Moore and others with a Late-Modern, abstract vocabulary. This phase of his work, consolidated in his own house conversion of 1978, has become increasingly self-conscious as it has become a popular genre and professional norm. With Gehry's production of cardboard furniture and Formica fish lamps, his many building commissions and art installations, his travelling exhibition originating at the Walker Art Gallery in 1986, his fish restaurants in Japan or fish skyscraper proposed for New York, and his acceptance as the leading American avant-gardist by *Progressive Architecture* and *House and Garden*¹ – with all this production and acclaim one can speak of a widespread acceptance of the Deconstructionist aesthetic. Like the clothing of *Esprit* and post-Punk music, it is an informal style appealing to a substantial taste for the discordant and ephemeral, the unpretentious and tough. It's a style for everyday street life and in this sense a direct

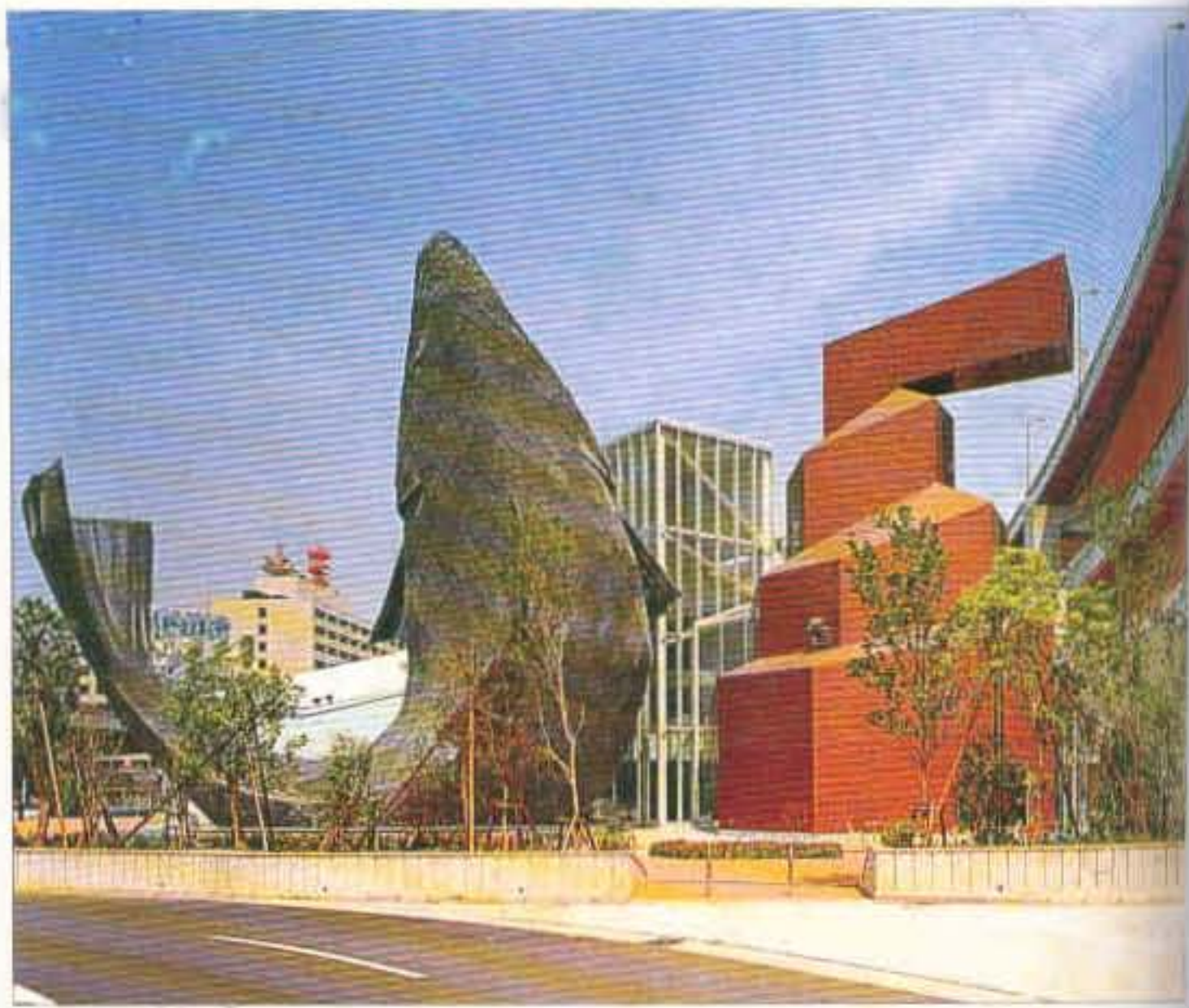
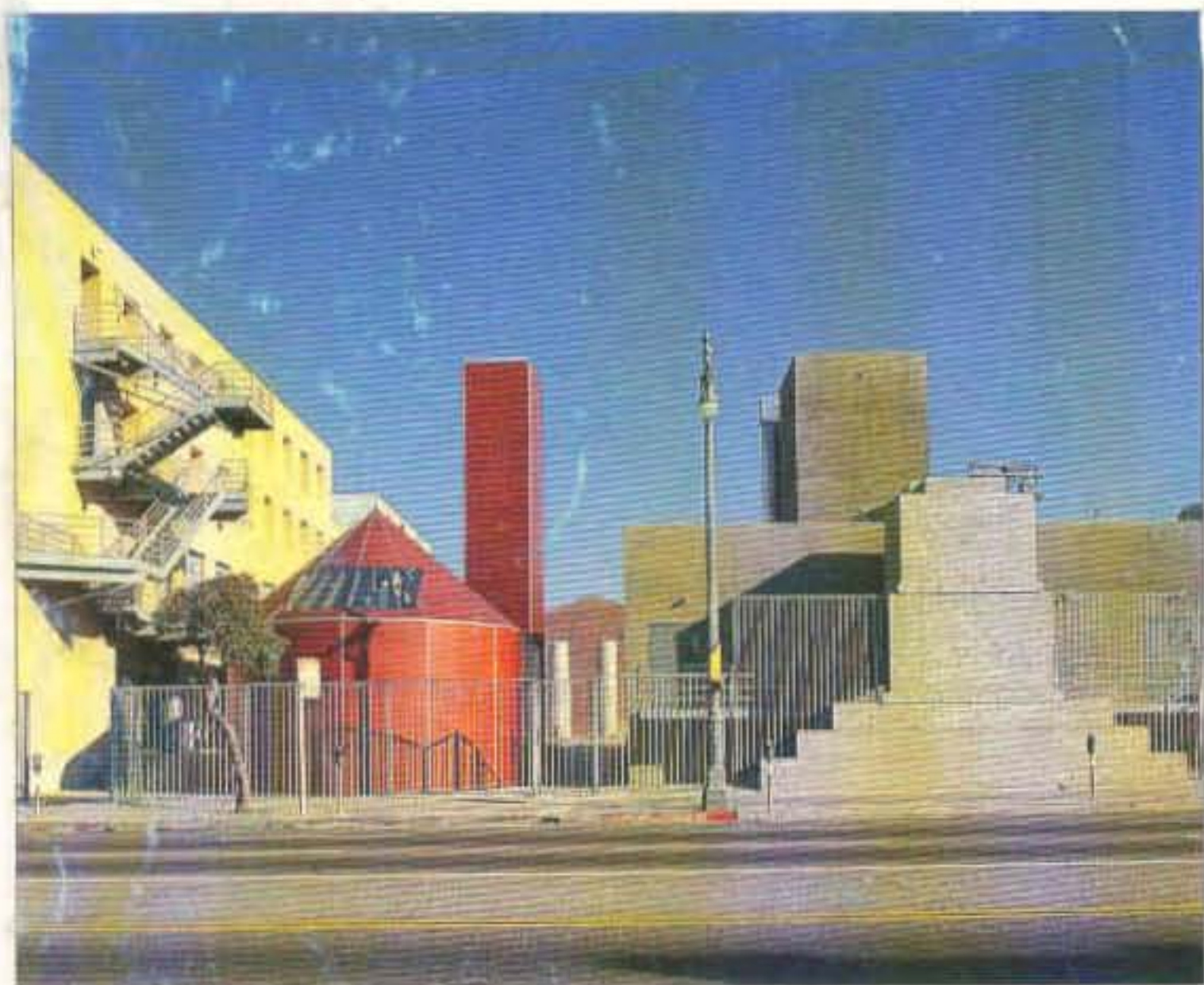
heir to the Modernism of Baudelaire's Paris, of Duchamp and Le Corbusier.

✧ Gehry's method of Deconstruction can be quite literal at times, since he will smash an existing building into parts, leave elements of his own work unfinished and, as in his disintegrating cardboard furniture, make an aesthetic virtue of rough, crumbled surfaces. The roots of this approach probably stem, as they do with Eisenman, from his complex attitude to his ethnic identity, a Jewish past at once denied and accepted as an emblematic role. Gehry changed his surname from Goldberg in his 20s, but now regrets it and would like to reconstruct his name again and wear his Jewishness openly.² Extensive psychoanalysis has helped him, as it has Eisenman, to understand his double motives and how they are quite normal in American life: a youthful renunciation of Judaism, a turn to atheism and then a return to ethnic identity, even the role of professional outcast, the *different*. 'Being accepted isn't everything', he says as the opening proverb to his life's work, as long as one's unacceptance is accepted.³

These ironies partly explain his extensive use of the fish motif. As a young boy he suffered several humiliations for being a 'fish eater', for 'smelling of fish', in short, for being a Jew in a tough Catholic neighbourhood in Toronto. 50 years later he was asked to design

or flared keystone, or any motif which cannot be explained by function and cost. In this sense the fish is the perfect symbol for Deconstructionist architecture, precisely because it is an absurd *non sequitur*. If, following Nietzsche, there is an arbitrary base in all cultural form, and if architects can never prove their choice of style and ornament, then why not fish? They 'deconstruct all our assumptions' and show, if it needed showing, that there is no natural and absolute base to architectural style.

I have discussed this marine animal at such length because its implications for design are more revealing than the abstract Deconstructions of Eisenman, Tschumi *et al.* They force us to confront 'otherness' in an unambiguous form: you can sublimate fractured grids and abstraction, but not this recognisable scaly friend. For 'The Shock of the New', Gehry substitutes 'The Shock of the Fish' and in this sense, and others, his Deconstruction is a kind of Ultra-Modernism: '... if everybody's going to say that classicism is perfection [Gehry is attacking Post-Modern classicism here] then I'm going to say fish is perfection, so why not copy fish? And then I'll be damned if I don't find reasons to reinforce why the fish is important and more interesting than classicism. That's intuitive...' ⁵ Here we have the Gehry dialectic, which like Eisenman's is a form of 'anti-classicism'.



FRANK GEHRY, L TO R: LOYOLA LAW SCHOOL, LOS ANGELES, 1981; FISH RESTAURANT, KOBE.

objects for the Formica product called Colorcore, a pristine plastic laminate which always looks fastidious no matter how you cut it. In a mood of inspired desperation Gehry threw his uptight material at the floor and it deconstructed into pieces with ripped or fractured edges. From these imperfect/perfect parts he made the scales of his fish lamps – art objects rather than reading lights, which sell in a gallery for well over 10,000 dollars. (I mention this inflated price because it contradicts Gehry's usual cheapskate aesthetic and shows his typical ability to move across categories.) The breakage, the transformation, the puns ('fish scales are the right scale for buildings') all have their counterpart in Eisenman, who will superimpose layers of glass and then break them to generate new, non-human forms of a transformational order.⁴ The parallel is obviously with Duchamp's *Large Glass*, 1915-23, which wasn't finished until it was broken.

The fish as Gehry's representational sign has been analysed for its Christian-Freudian overtones, but these are probably less important than two more obvious meanings. It's a friendly image which people will respond to with affection, as they do to elephant and dinosaur buildings (other animals which have been constructed many times as habitable volumes). Moreover, in its sheer gratuity it becomes Gehry's emblem for the artist and architect, his version of a Corinthian capital

always having the enemy close at hand, depending on it for oppositional definition.

This brings us to the crux, and what is perhaps veiled hypocrisy, of Deconstruction: it always depends for its meaning on that which is previously constructed. It always posits an orthodoxy which it 'subverts', a norm which it breaks, an assumption and ideology which it undermines. And the minute it loses this critical role, or becomes a dominant power itself (as in so many academies), it becomes a tyrannical bore. The same is true of Deconstructionist architecture: it works best as an exception within a strongly defined norm.

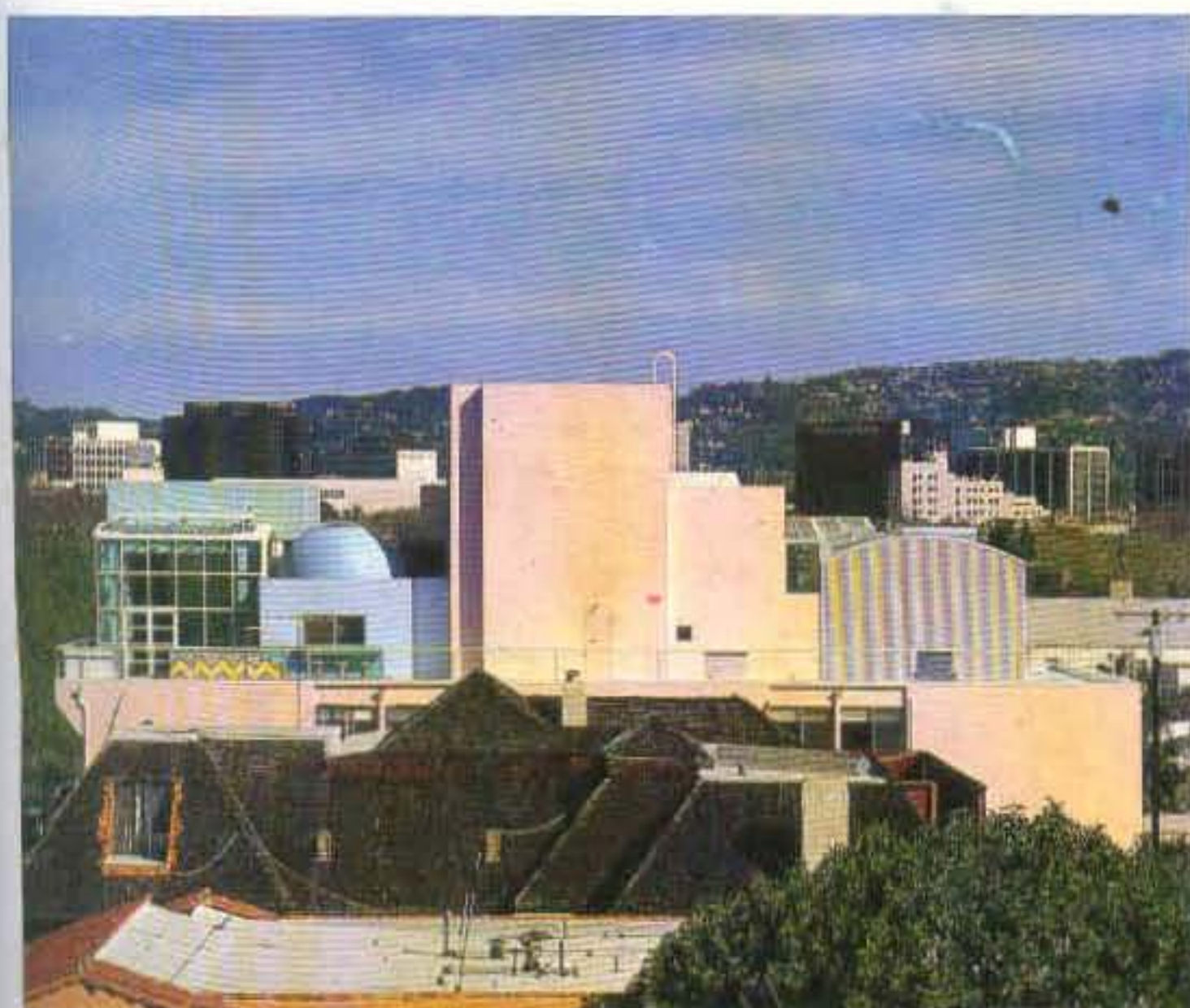
Gehry's additions to and transformations of the Loyola Law School are a case in point. The urban context may not constitute a strong norm – it's a near slum close to downtown Los Angeles – but Gehry has borrowed the adjacent morphology of towers and industrial fabric, just as he has adapted the small-block planning and *Collage City* of the Post-Modern classicists whom he otherwise disdains. These norms are then fractured and eroded to create an ensemble of three (non) temples and one (non) palazzo surmounted by a central (non) aedicula of glass. The client saw a classicising typology as suitable for the study of law, which has its roots in Greece and Rome, and it's Gehry's simultaneous acceptance and resistance of this which gives the scheme a rough

tension. Columns and colonnades are built with a primitive solidity lacking base, capital and entasis; a freestanding portico is built in aluminium and repeated on a larger scale – both versions without pediments; a belfry has no visible bell; a 'Romanesque' chapel is made from rough Finnish plywood and glass; and three grand stairways – contemporary Baroque flourishes – are constructed without mouldings or balusters. The windows of the (non) palazzo are the typical punched voids of Adolf Loos, rectangles that are classically proportioned but missing their 'eyebrows' and other articulations. These absences may have annoyed the Viennese, 70 years ago, but here, however, critics and the public admire the pleasure of these missing elements and find them suitable for the informality of Los Angeles. The architecture breaks up and frames social activity very effectively, and allows many opportunities for sitting down or moving through and over the space. Altogether it's a successfully scaled and punctuated urban place which owes a lot to the classical typology it deconstructs.

Gehry's Wosk House additions, a penthouse 'village' placed on top of an apartment in Beverly Hills, uses one fractured language to contrast with a second, conventional one. A village typology subverts the pristine pink base in the Hollywood International Style. Gehry has again appropriated and deconstructed the classicism of Michael Graves,

In the Wosk penthouse the space flows freely between volumes, yet is partly divided by subtle articulations. The client's brightly coloured paintings, tiles and artefacts are sympathetically framed and set off by the background, yet contrasted. Indeed, since Miriam Wosk contributed so much of her own style to the design, it is 'finished' and detailed to a degree rare in Gehry's work.

Deconstruction is most effective when norms of construction and ornament are also there to be resisted. The danger for Gehry, which he hasn't altogether avoided with his increase in commissions and attendant poetic license, is that his work becomes completely arbitrary and hermetically sculptural, referring only to his whims of composition. His most successful interventions, such as the attachment to the Aerospace Museum in Los Angeles, relate directly to the function and urban context – here, the celebration of flight and the mixed, semi-industrial landscape. On the exterior a Lockheed F 104 Starfighter takes off at an angle, both an icon in the Constructivist tradition and in the vernacular of LA billboards and giant donut buildings. The broken volumes in whites, greys, and silvers suggest the anonymity of aeroplane hangers and their collisions capture the energy of explosive movement. They also suggest the contradictory aims of the defence policy where billion dollar weaponry is built and destroyed for



FRANK GEHRY, L TO R: WOSK HOUSE, BEVERLY HILLS, 1982-4; STATE OF CALIFORNIA AEROSPACE MUSEUM, SANTA MONICA, 1982-4

the Post-Modern classicist he often chides, whose initial Portland scheme also had a village of primitive temples surmounting a giant base. Thus the temples of Graves become a greenhouse/dining room, a mute pink elevator shaft and a corrugated metal studio with bowed roof. Some interior spaces are elided – thus denying the representational truth of these volumes – while others do indeed hold discrete functions. For instance, and quite oddly, Gehry puts the kitchen under a dome borrowed from Nero's Golden House, and then paints it baby blue! The intentional 'bad taste' of this gesture is repeated on the other side where a ziggurat shape is painted with an industrial colour known as Golden Cadillac. In effect Gehry is not only sending up Graves and classicism, but the whole neighbourhood, the pre-existing building, his client, and himself.

Yet this is not a radical critique or subversion, but, as with much Deconstruction, something closer to music hall satire – a wry, complicitous insinuation, a joke made from within the system and told with a wink. Deconstructionists often assert that one must operate inside the language, (or 'text' of society) in order to break down its assumptions, and this is certainly Gehry's tactic. He usually tries to work with some of the assumptions and taste of his client, to bring the building in on time and budget, and to come up with ingenious functional solutions.

symbolic purposes: it's an effective analogue of the baroque cacophony of the Cold War. However, the Aerospace Museum has a characteristic Gehry problem: it assaults the rather drab building to which it is attached, thus denying the possibility of a gentle discourse and continuity. This is the classic stance of most Deconstruction, which makes contact with what exists by contrast and aggression.

Rem Koolhaas and Neo-Constructivism

The Neo-Constructivist aesthetic unites the work of Gehry with that of such designers as Rem Koolhaas, Arquitectonica, Zaha Hadid and Bernard Tschumi into a clearly identifiable 'school'. Whereas Gehry tends to revive Early-Constructivism, especially in his exhibition structures on the Constructivists, Koolhaas and Hadid lean towards Late-Constructivism (the work of Leonidov), and Tschumi towards the most ripe practitioner of the style – Chernikhov. As with most revivals there is an ideological component and here it is an attempt to continue a Modernist tradition of the 30s and 50s which was heading towards both mass-popularity and hedonism. Koolhaas looks to the 50s populism of Wallace Harrison and, at the same time, to the programmatic inventiveness of Manhattan, the 'culture of congestion' which produced the delirious superabundance of piled-up life-styles

and functions. *Delirious New York* is a form of Surrealism, a surreal and rational polemic for building our cities. Ideologically opposed to Post-Modernism, it is nevertheless historicist: its revivals are just confined to the post-20s.

*Koolhaas and his group called OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) have produced many city projects which illustrate their theories and have won several competitions – only to find themselves placed second after political intervention.⁶ OMA's work is not so much Deconstructionist as combinatory, combining typologies of many different Modernists – Hilberseimer, Mies, Cedric Price, Malevich, Leonidov – but doing so in a way which is discontinuous with the existing fabric, as in the scheme for the Parc de la Villette. This layering of opposed systems so that they are randomised and discontinuous amounts to a formal Deconstruction and OMA's work has had a significant effect on Hadid, Arquitectonica and Tschumi, who are more obviously within the general trend.

*For the Parc de la Villette Koolhaas proposed an interesting new landscape strategy to deal with an overly complex and detailed brief. He divided the long site into a series of lateral 'bands' of different activities and planting. These thin bands have small elements or 'confetti' sprinkled randomly over the site. Then comes a layer of large elements, including the existing buildings, then circulation and connecting layers. Thus the superimposition of five separate systems results in a rich texture which copes with the complex programme and its uncertain growth and funding. This flexibility and indeterminacy, indebted to Cedric Price's 'non-plans' of the 60s, has an elegance and humour not often found in the genre. Because there is no overall figural shape, the scheme is disorienting, as is all good Deconstruction, but the staccato of repeated bands does provide a minimal coherence for the delightful 'confetti' of buildings and gardens to play against. It's very much the urban garden demanded in the brief and ultimately a new model for Deconstruction, as challenging and convincing as anything Tschumi and Eisenman have proposed. No doubt something like it will be built some day.

One scheme, the Churchill Plan for Rotterdam, uses a Deconstructionist method of composition where skyscraper volumes are cut up and inverted.* Thus inclined planes and columns lean in counterpoint to each other (Hadid takes this distortion to a further extreme). Another scheme, for Checkpoint Charlie, takes the Berlin Wall as its departure point and rings the changes on repeated elements: not only the wall, but the courtyard house, chimney, stairway, curtain wall and what Koolhaas provocatively calls 'the limp curve of humanism'. One of their many paintings displays the kind of intricate, abstract planning that J J P Oud and other Dutch Modernists practised in the early 20s. It shows an urban tissue which is continuously varied and effectively pared into nicely scaled domestic fragments. Koolhaas might be reluctant to attribute this to his Dutch background and the tradition of De Hooch, but it is implicitly here, and it mediates effectively the over-concentration inherent in his 'culture of congestion'. This is no small matter since the major problem of mass-culture is its anomie; its lack of divisible, defensive space, and its absence of small-scale identity.

Koolhaas's first major completed building, the National Dance Theatre in The Hague, is more reticent than his paintings, partly because of the site and budget constraints, and partly because he advocates a 'new sobriety'. The Minimalism of Mies disciplines all the abstract shapes which rise and fall in happy agitation – as in Gehry's penthouse. They are organised loosely in a spiral of materials and colours that run from black stucco to gold leaf. This starts at the back with the most utilitarian forms, and the tempo picks up as one moves around the site giving way to glazed motifs, sloping aluminium piers (fat 'cocktail sticks'), a mural of dancing figures on the stage tower, and then the most sensuous shape – an inverted cone in gold – which marks the entrance and restaurant. The wavy roof, the interior ovoid satellite suspended by cables and the swimming pool suggest a counter-theme, the programmatic hedonism which underlies OMA's theory. The foyer has the dynamic spatial quality conveyed in a

Koolhaas painting. A ceiling slides down into the wall, giving perspectival distortion, while the suspended ovoid champagne bar and curving balcony add further accelerations of movement. Colour contrasts increase the speed and, taken together, all the moving forms convey the feeling of a very swift and controlled dance. The anti-gravitational architecture of Leonidov is used here effectively as forms are held as 'tension in space', bodies which are frozen in mid-leap. As usual Koolhaas contrasts stereotypes the way a Surrealist plays the game 'exquisite corpse' – that is, as a series of cool disjunctions and dead-pan collisions. There is a built-in alienation to this method because each language game confronts the next with no implied integration or meaning, winner or loser, linkage or resolution. As in *Delirious New York* it's a stand-off between separate, equally valid fantasies, phobias, ideologies and ways of life.*

Unlikely as it may at first seem, Arquitectonica has turned Koolhaas' approach into a very successful commercial formula in Miami, but then this Florida city has essentialised New York trends in the past, most importantly for this team the style known as Skyscraper Deco. Laurinda Spear and Bernardo Fort-Brescia, the wife-and-husband leaders of Arquitectonica, assume Modernist typologies for their work – such as the repetitive glass box – and then break it up with an assortment of graphic motifs: red triangle, yellow balcony and blue square (a void of space known as a 'skycourt'). The three Bauhaus primaries are thus used to deconstruct the dumb box, in this case a rectangle of expensive condominiums disguised as offices behind slick, black mirrorplate. The name of these luxury condominiums, 'The Atlantis', is as much a *non sequitur* as a question of styling and one is bound to question whether the motives are not more commercial than artistic. Arquitectonica might well protest that this opposition is unfair; after all, their flamboyant art is inspired by commerce and its fantasies. Hence the names, 'The Palace', 'The Babylon', 'The Miracle Center' (on Miracle Mile, Coral Gables); hence the attachment to 30s shapes such as kidneys and boomerangs; hence the 'cocktail' colours and chic surfaces, the design from outside-in.

This last method, a reversal of Modernist doctrine, still relates closely to the Modernism of holiday architecture, to their love of Rio de Janeiro, and for this reason their style might be called, with only slight exaggeration, 'Miami-Niemeyer'.* Because they turn 20s Modernism on its head and sometimes literally on its side (walls are treated as roofs and vice versa), they are more directly subversive to the movement than are outsiders. Their commercial play with the grammar of social responsibility deconstructs, as it were, 'the ideological assumptions of socialism from within'. Or does it? Perhaps their work is more a continuation of the Miami vernacular, an unlikely mixture of Morris, Lapidus, Moderne and marketing. The intentions and results are deeply ambiguous, even diffused in oppositions. For public buildings, such as the North Dade Courthouse, they adopt a more serious version of Neo-Constructivism; for shopping centres and marina/condos they proffer a mixture of the flamboyant and the dumb. The graphic invention of Spear is evenly balanced by the astute salesmanship of Fort-Brescia, a man who has gained the confidence of developers not only in Florida and Texas, but Peru as well. This combination allows the very programmatic density and opposition which OMA seek: at the Miracle Center a shopping mall is set off by functions which Koolhaas finds essential for the 'culture of congestion': the swimming pool, theatre and health club. But the variety and opposition which these functions imply, their schizoid dynamism, is smoothed over by an accommodating version of Neo-Constructivism.

*Zaha Hadid's Neo-Constructivism, by contrast, is more extreme and closer in spirit to its source, the mystical Suprematism of Kazimir Malevich and his block compositions known as Tektonics. Like Arquitectonica and Tschumi, Hadid has been strongly influenced by Rem Koolhaas, who was her tutor. For several years in the late 70s she was a member of OMA and since then she has taught at the Architectural Association in London, a centre, if there is one, for this decentring movement, providing show space for the Deconstructionists' very

exquisite drawings.⁷ Indeed these drawings, and sometimes paintings, which express an energetic, sometimes explosive and usually optimistic form of anti-gravitational architecture, are the essence of the movement, more influential than the few completed buildings and divergent theory.

Zaha Hadid's winning entry for the Peak competition in Hong Kong exemplifies this. The idea of the luxurious club is conveyed through a dynamic painting that seems to be exploded apart in a series of fractured planes: actually it's based on an 'exploded isometric' projection which is virtually impossible to figure out. Blue and grey facets abstract the mountainous topography and Hadid imagines that several rock outcrops will be polished so that her flying beams would tie in with a shiny new nature. With this rocky architecture we are close to Domenig's Expressionism and his Stone House. But Hadid's elements are rectilinear, the tectonic beams of Malevich made extra long, rotated off the grid and combined with slight curves and dissonant angles. The new feeling of explosive, warped dynamism comes from the acute angles she chooses to use for laying out the perspective, an anamorphic projection which gives a distorted view except from one point. This graphic dislocation then becomes the basis for her programme and metaphysic. As she says, functional elements of the club 'hover like spaceships' or 'suspended satellites'.⁸ The club itself is a void 13 metres high suspended between the roof of the second layer and the underside of the penthouse layer.⁹ In other words 'layering', common to both Late- and Post-Modernists, is being used as an anti-gravitational device. And had it been built, the engineering to hold the building up would have been a series of box trusses and box beams flying slightly at angles towards each other – the 'cocktail sticks' of Koolhaas. The end result resembles a Malevich Tektonic which has been elongated and skewed by an earthquake.

Such 'Planetary Architecture', as Hadid calls it, is placed in opposition to historicism by her and critics such as Kenneth Frampton. For him the work continues the 'unfinished project of Modernism', implying that Modernism was fundamentally concerned with 'machine eroticism' and 'hedonism'. Except for a few Constructivist and Bauhaus designers this characterisation sounds unlikely. Equally bizarre is the notion that this 'Neo' style, a revival of the 20s and 50s, isn't historicist. Frampton is much closer to the mark when he characterises the whole oeuvre as a kind of 'cursive script' and says 'This inscription is so hermetic as to defy decoding'. This comment is offered as praise and it's one that might be applied to Deconstructionist architecture in general. One thing that defines it as Neo-Modern is precisely this personal symbolism, the text which only its author understands and controls.

Here we touch on a paradox of Deconstruction. Having, with Roland Barthes, announced the 'death of the author', 'the pleasure of the text' and the joint creation by many texts, or 'intertextuality', designers such as Hadid, Libeskind and Eisenman nevertheless create the most individual symbolism possible, one where only the author has the authority to tell you what it means. This ultra-poetic use of language is virtually private and therefore authoritarian; fully architectural language must, by definition, be more public.

And yet certainly there are shared meanings to the style. Many of the young have a developed taste for dynamic abstraction and the majority of the profession are still Late-Modernists. This architecture may be impossible to decode in specific instances, as Frampton avers, but in general it signifies the determination to continue Modernism as an elite discourse and it has a very strong ideological component. Hence the constant references to Le Corbusier, Terragni and the Constructivists used not so much as quotes, but as the final meaning.

Hadid's work signifies quite clearly the continuation of Modernism as a distorted abstraction. Her office project for Berlin is almost the normal slab block, but is gently warped, skewed and bent. Just as the Rococo style made very small variations on an essentially economic structure, she twists functional elements and extends walls at the corners to give the appearance of a wilful exuberance. The plans of this

building show a few boomerang walls and leaning piers, the customary 'cocktail sticks'; the transparent curtain wall shows gently curving skin that tilts out as it rises; and the sequence of space is punctuated by layered wedges and cantilevered beams. In other words, a refinement of dynamic expression is made by warping a no-nonsense Modern block. This is a piecemeal heightening of an existing aesthetic, not something radically new, yet the subtle articulations feel entirely fresh: balconies fly about like half-finished slices of brie; glass planes are faceted by thin, elegant cuts which taper so delicately they look like incisions made by a surgeon. The accumulation of many such warps and cuts results in a totality which feels new.

Deconstruction Goes 'Public'

The feeling of the new, created by combining forms of the old Modernism, is nowhere so strong as in Bernard Tschumi's winning competition masterplan for the Parc de la Villette in northern Paris. Combining images and tactics from the 20s and 60s, his series of red buildings called '*folies*' are meant to signify at once the British 'folly' in the 18th-century garden and the French notion of 'madness' (as elucidated by Foucault in his *Histoire de la folie*). This conjunction of irrationalities, proposed as a 'Park of the 21st century', has a certain mad logic to it since it replaces part of the 60 million dollar meat market that was recently built and then never used, a mega-folly on the scale of one of NASA's greater accomplishments in the genre. And when President Mitterand, who presided over this *grand projet* among others, had to announce that the winning competition design consisted of more *folies*, with a price in the multimillions, French intellectual life suddenly woke up to the era of official, built Deconstruction. The government naturally asked Tschumi to change the name to something less embarrassing such as 'fabrique' and he, equally naturally, refused.

Tschumi's plan, as mentioned, makes a fresh combination of previous formulae which are acknowledged as historical: the layering of three systems – points, lines and surfaces – explicitly recalls Kandinsky's and Klee's aesthetics; the transformation of *folies* resembles Chernikhov's '101 architectural fictions' in method and style; the graphic abstraction of the aerial perspective owes something to Cedric Price, Archigram and OMA. This last is recalled by the dislocation of red dots, green lines, and cinematic swirls which float on an abstract grey and black background, the representation of 'any city'. This non-place could be the flatscape of a parking lot, or a suburban sprawl littered with supermarkets, parkways, little houses and garden plots. In this sense it's an abstraction of social reality, an attempt to make high art from the heterogeneous fragmentations that surround any major city, particularly Paris, and it's no small irony that Tschumi aims his paintings of this conceptualised nowhere-ville at the art market, selling them at the Max Protech Gallery in New York. This, after all, is a knowing *praxis* which once again works within the system it purports to deconstruct.

If completed as planned, the Parc de la Villette will have over 30 *folies*: fire-engine red constructions of enamelled steel, located every 120 metres on a grid. Their use, an ideal Koolhaas mix, combines hedonistic and educational activities. Baths, cinema, restaurant, health club, music and science centres are set amongst a host of small gardens. These will be connected by a three-kilometre randomly snaking gallery which Tschumi calls the 'cinematic promenade' because it is a montage of images with a layout that takes the form of an unrolled filmstrip. The list of garden designer's reads like a roll-call of Late-Modernists and it includes John Hejduk, Dan Flavin, Jean Nouvel, Gaetano Pesce, Daniel Buren in association with Jean-François Lyotard, and the long-awaited collaboration of Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida. If they all do their own thing, the result could be one of the oddest agglomerations of the 20th century: a type of avant-garde Disneyworld which will be, final surprise, integrated through abstraction and the internalised references of the art and architectural worlds. Here Eisenman will be commenting on Libeskind's comments on Eisenman's previous work, where nearly everyone is a

Neo-Constructivist, harmony of a kind prevails.

This, of course, contradicts basic Deconstructionist theory and the intentions of Tschumi which are always concerned with *différance* not unity. It is true the layout favours chance and coincidence, the incongruities and discontinuities which result when three different systems are layered randomly and at angles to each other. The superimposition of many more Late-Modern gardens will further the disjunctions. But unless the designers and formulae are chosen from a wider spectrum – and this would mean the inclusion of Post-Modernists and traditionalists – the result will be unintentionally monistic, recalling Harold Rosenberg's ironic characterisation of the avant-garde liberal intellectuals as 'a herd of independent minds'.

Such orthodoxy, it goes without saying, differs from Jacques Derrida's reading of the scheme. He writes specifically of *les folies* in the plural and emphasises throughout his text that: 'We will have to account with this plural.'¹⁰ It is worth quoting from this text at length since it is a rare example of the Deconstructionist philosopher writing on architecture, and it illustrates the main tenor of this philosophy. One should note, in reading the following, that Derrida places special emphasis on the atemporal now, *maintenant*, which implies the dislocation of an event that is still occurring:



OMA, RESIDENCE OF THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER, DUBLIN, 1979, AERIAL VIEW

The *folies* put into operation a general dislocation; they draw into it everything that, until *maintenant*, seems to have given architecture meaning. More precisely, everything that seems to have given architecture over to meaning. They deconstruct first of all, but not only, the semantics of architecture.

... An always-hierarchising nostalgia: architecture will materialise the hierarchy in stone or wood (*hylè*); it is a hyletics of the sacred (*hieros*) and the principle (*archè*), an *archi-hieratics* ...

These *folies* destabilise meaning, the meaning of meaning, the signifying ensemble of this powerful architectonics. They put in question, dislocate, destabilise or deconstruct the edifice of this configuration ... We should not avoid the issue: if this configuration presides over what in the West is called architecture, do these *folies* not raze it? Do they not lead back to the desert of 'anarchitecture', a zero degree of architectural writing where this writing would lose itself, henceforth without finality, aesthetic aura, fundamentals, hierarchical principles or symbolic signification; in short in a prose made of abstract, neutral, inhuman, useless, uninhabitable and meaningless volumes?

Precisely not. The *folies* affirm ... they maintain, renew and reinscribe architecture. They revive, perhaps, an energy which

was infinitely anaesthetised, walled in, buried in a common grave or sepulchral nostalgia ...

These *folies* do not destroy. Tschumi always talks about 'deconstruction/reconstruction' ... By pushing 'architecture towards its limits', a place will be made for 'pleasure'; each *folie* will be destined for a given 'use', with its own cultural, ludic, pedagogical, scientific and philosophical finalities ... the structure of the grid and of each cube – for these points are cubes – leaves opportunities for chance, formal invention, combinatory transformation, wandering.

What could a deconstructive architecture be? ... Deconstructions would be feeble if they were negative, if they did not construct, and above all if they did not first measure themselves against institutions in their solidarity, *at the place of their greatest resistance*: political structures, levers of economic decision ...

One does not declare war. Another strategy weaves itself between hostilities and negotiations ... Architect-weaver. He plots grids, twining the threads of a chain, his writing holds out a net. A weave always weaves in several directions, several meanings, and beyond meaning. A network-strategem, and thus

a singular device ...

There are strong words in Tschumi's lexicon. They locate the points of greatest intensity. These are the words beginning with *trans* (transcript, transference, etc) and, above all, *de-* or *dis-*. These words speak destabilisation, deconstruction, dehiscence and, first of all, dissociation, disjunction, disruption, *différance*. An architecture of heterogeneity, interruption, non-coincidence. But who would have built in this manner? Who would have counted on only the energies in *dis-* or *de-*? No work results from a simple displacement or dislocation. Therefore invention is needed ... it gathers together the *différance* ... A transaction aimed at a spacing and at a *socius* of dissociation.¹¹

At moments in this analytical panegyric to Tschumi, especially when he asks rhetorical questions to answer them in the negative, Derrida sounds like Nietzsche; at other times his thinking is inspired by alliteration and analogy, as if poetic thought would deconstruct rationality.¹² If he flirts with nihilism ('meaningless volumes') ... only to reject it and thereby assert a generalised affirmation, and then he switches back and forth quickly between many possible 'de-'. In the deconstruction/reconstruction antinomies of Nietzsche. Behind the stalemate of oppositions it is possible to find two defining accents

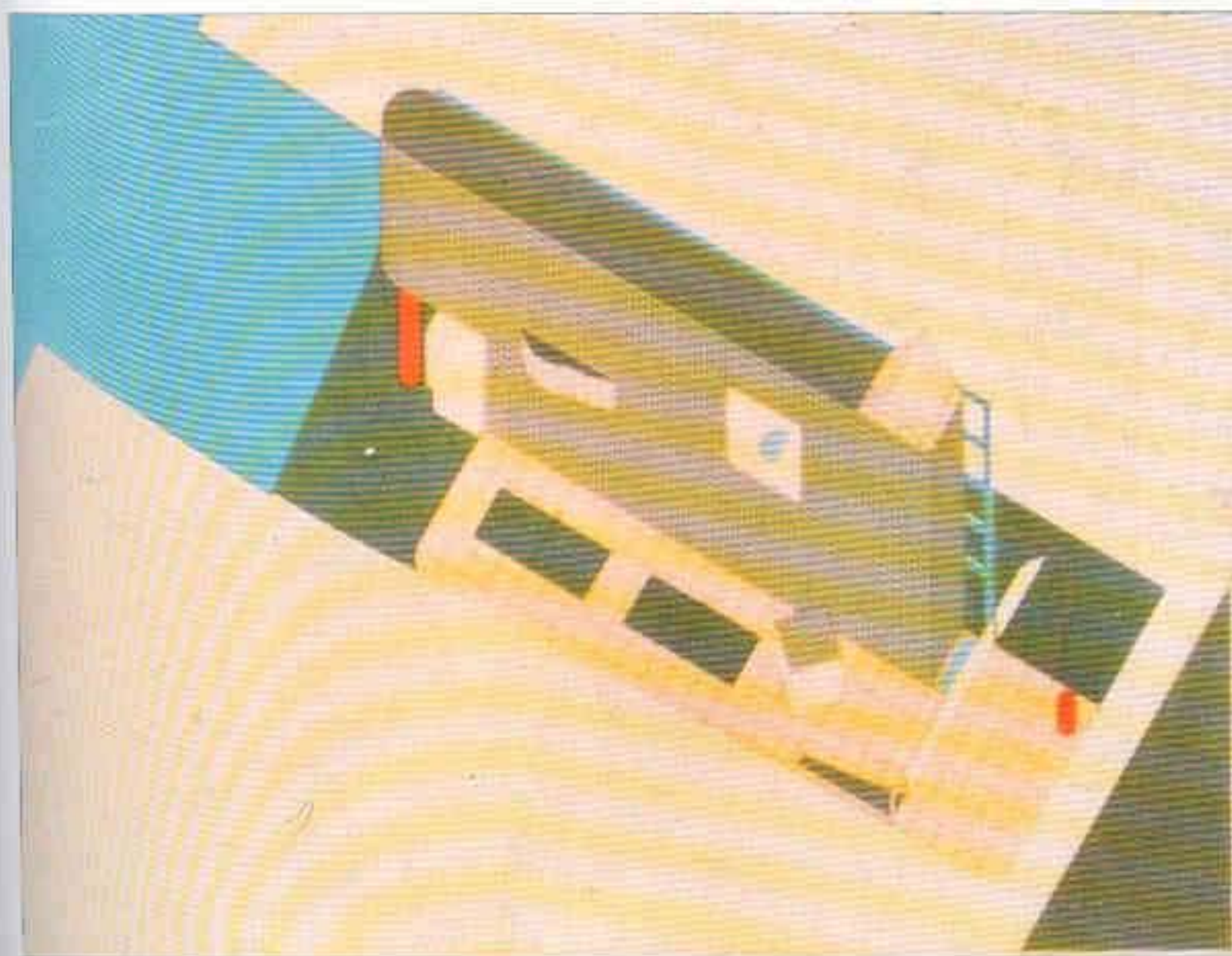
emphasis on the *pleasure* of wandering in an unstable permeable 'weave', to use his metaphor, a kind of in-between or liminal state, and the idea that Tschumi's Parc forms a '*socius* of dissociation' which gathers together *différance*.

As already mentioned I would dispute that the latter constitutes a real pluralism, which must be founded on a wider set of public languages than a restricted abstraction, but there can be no doubt about the pleasure of Tschumi's constructions and layout: the tilted walls which recall the anamorphic projections of Hadid, the undulating tensile walkways (engineered by Peter Rice), the flying cantilevers and skewed 'cocktail sticks', the juxtaposed space frames in blood-red steel, the collision of different plants and curving allées of trees. In short, Neo-Constructivist aesthetics are played with considerable invention and skill.

As for the 'point-grid' plan and the random sprawl, this is meant to be interpreted as emptiness (what Tschumi calls *la case vide* or 'empty slot'), the kind of urban reality already created by Modernism, industrialisation and the 'dispersion' of contemporary life.¹³ The critic Anthony Vidler juxtaposes this decentring with the work of what he calls the Post-Modern 'nostalgics' and their concern for recentring urban life.¹⁴ The *folies*, or *cases vides*, are on this reading 'open

rately conditioned and externally controlled ciphers who have lost their identity and history.¹⁶ And so we have the Deconstructionists' abhorrence of meaning and hierarchy, sentiments shared by Tschumi, Eisenman and Derrida, and their corresponding elevation of the Empty Man, the nomadic 'man without qualities' who can weave his way through all hierarchies showing them to be temporary and nonsensical. Empty Man, or Orgman, as Rosenberg also notes ironically 'is, with necessary additions and disguise, none else than the new intellectual talking about himself'¹⁷: the nomadic international traveller without family attachments or long-term commitments or a past that he cares to recognise. In brief it's a picture of that *beau-ideal* of the 20th century, the Futurist and Existentialist who defines his goals and changes them without much sentiment or angst.

And yet this ideal type, the Empty Man, has another aspect to his character which may come as something of a surprise: he always seeks and then predictably finds, like a 13th-century pilgrim pursuing the Holy Grail, the empty centre at the heart of society, the self-contradiction of all texts, the Great Void of Extinction – and this cheers him up. For what he has discovered is a religion without faith, a positive nihilism,¹⁸ or in Derrida's terms an affirmative Deconstruction. This certainty of meaninglessness is very bracing: it also leads to a very



ARQUITECTONICA, L TO R: AXONOMETRIC FOR THE ATLANTIS, MIAMI, 1979-82; NORTH DADE COURTHOUSE, FLORIDA, 1985-7

structures for the nomadic *banlieue*, elements which have no meaning in time and space, perfect receptacles for an uprooted, anarchic and confused mass-culture, and in this sense hardly a utopian prospect. But then Tschumi intends a celebration of the status quo: 'I would say that La Villette is not about the way things should happen in the future, but the way things are now today. There are no utopias today.'¹⁵ Such arguments sound, ironically, like the Post-Modernist Robert Venturi explicating Las Vegas for its lessons 15 years earlier, but now Venturi's 'decorated sheds' have lost their decoration, or rather had it abstracted to a red hue, a colour meant, like the white and black used elsewhere, to be a non-colour. Empty slots, non-hierarchies and non-colours, de-this and that, oh the pleasures of the absences!

That we are seeing here the style of urban anomie raised to a high art should come as no surprise, since it is one of the most recurrent archetypes of Late-Modernism and has been so since Cedric Price's 'non-plans' of the 60s. It's important to stress the historical nature of this idea since it is so central to the Deconstructionist enterprise. The sociology of alienation, developed by William H Whyte (*The Organisation Man*) and David Reisman (*The Lonely Crowd*), has led to the spectre of a world populated by 'other-directed' automata, what Harold Rosenberg has sarcastically termed 'Orgmen', that is, corpo-

coherent style of absence, something equivalent to the great styles of iconoclasm and self-renunciation of Cistercianism of the 13th century and Zen-Buddhist art.

Hiromi Fujii, in part a follower of Eisenman, is one master of this genre who produces many buildings which signify the beauties of absence: missing walls and windows, cut planes, uncoloured surfaces, etc. As he describes it, his method of 'metamorphology alters acquired meanings (customary codes) for the sake of producing non-conforming relationships'.¹⁹ A set of mechanical operations, different from Tschumi's and Eisenman's in operation but similar in their random mechanism, is performed to alter the customary codes: 'disparity, gapping, opposition, reversal'.²⁰ Characteristically the grid marches all over the building in black and white reversals to destroy the conventional relations of up/down, roof/wall and furniture/room.

Another master of this cryptic religious style is John Hejduk whose bleak and beautiful constructions often resemble a functional mechanism that is deconstructed and reconstituted on a new scale. For Berlin he has designed a scenario and set of 67 structures called *Victims* which are intended to be placed, one each year, on the site of the former Gestapo Headquarters. Each one is named with a label that is both functional and associative and then placed on a point-grid with no

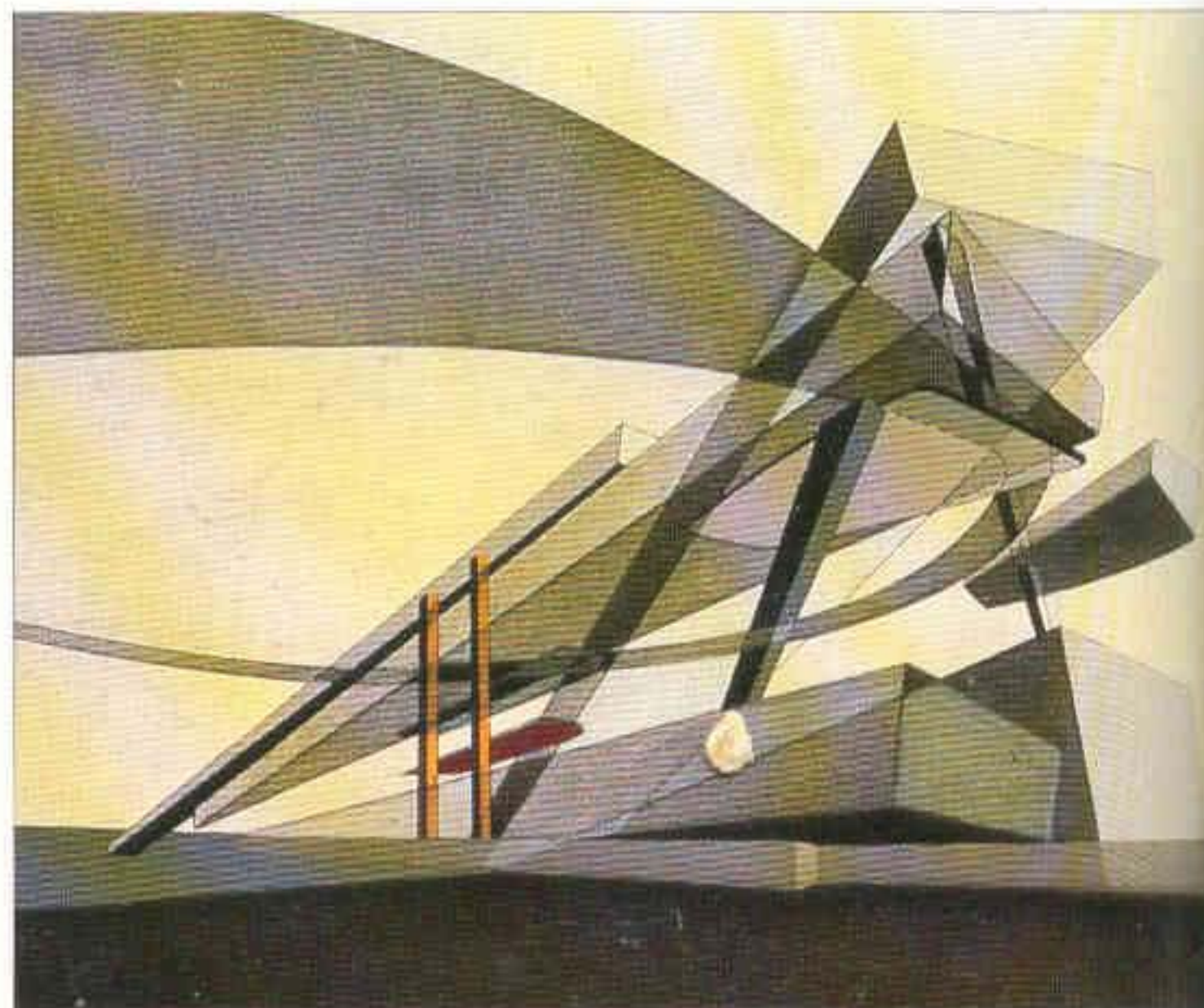
discernible overall geometry of layout. A related mechanism, *The Collapse of Time*, was built by the Architectural Association for a London Square, an odd choice of site for this structure because, as an adjacent plaque indicated, it too commemorated the victims of the Gestapo. Passers-by could watch over a four-week period while Time, represented by a set of stacked cubes (coffins?) numbered one to 13, fell to 45 degrees and then collapsed onto their bier. The image of railroad tracks, five pairs of wheels and the bleak wood containers was both poetically childlike and disturbing, humorous and remorseless, a vivid memorial to those who took their last journey on a wooden train. The blocking of the '12th hour' implies that we are now Post-Holocaust and the presence of the number 13 is a funny/mordant reminder of that floor which is usually missing in skyscrapers. Hejduk combines word, scenario and Minimalist image in a unique style, but his work relates to that work of Libeskind and Eisenman in having an almost nihilistic metaphysical origin.

Peter Eisenman, the Positive Nihilist

No architect is more committed to the faith of dogmatic scepticism, the importance of the gaps and contradictions within the text, than Peter Eisenman. In about 1978 he became a Deconstructionist and at the

series of mechanical processes which destroyed the centre of the house (decentring), anthropomorphic scale (scaling), and customary usages (a glass wall is used as a floor and is cantilevered over space). House X itself was not built, but a version of it was, a squashed-down axonometric model which looked from every angle except one as though it had been carefully blown down by a very precise tornado. This violent anamorphic act ('an attack on representation') was, in its sheer gratuity, just one more distancing means among many others that Eisenman was to deploy in order to reveal the arbitrary, non-natural mechanism of design, its possible anti-humanist, anti-classical bias. That the abstract results were also quite beautiful and sensuous was admitted, but this unfortunate human vestige was soon to be expunged – a computer would see to that. The world must be alienated after all.²²

Fundamental to Eisenman's notion of alienation is his understanding of the Modern *episteme*, as outlined in a 1976 article called 'Post-Functionalism'. Using Foucault's idea of an underlying thought pattern or iconology for every period, he generalises the 'Modern' as an anti-humanist epoch which leads stylistically to a series of 'non-s' ('non-objective abstract painting of Malevich and Mondrian', 'non-narrative, atemporal writing of Joyce and Apollinaire', 'non-narrative



ZAHA HADID, L TO R: KURFÜRSTENDAMM 70, BERLIN, 1985-6, VIEW FROM KURFÜRSTENDAMM; HONG KONG PEAK, 1981-3, ELEMENTS OF THE VOID

same time underwent psychoanalysis; two events that have no doubt reinforced each other and his own dogmatic scepticism. It's illuminating to give a brief summary of his development, partly based on his own words, because it shows how much he is attracted to current philosophies and theories of the moment and how he intentionally 'mis-reads' them for his own purposes to give his work what he rightly calls a 'didactic energy'.²¹ His buildings, writings and theories all have a frantic energy and are compulsively mixed together as if this might produce a real breakthrough, a new non-architecture which is part writing, building and model. Paradoxically his aesthetic has remained much the same white-gridded abstraction as his first houses, although several tactics such as the L-shape and half-buried building have been added to the repertoire.

The first houses, numbered I and II, were carrying forward the Modernist syntax of Le Corbusier and Terragni. Houses III and VI were Late-Modern exercises in 'pure formalism', influenced by the art-historians Rosalind Krauss and Clement Greenberg, Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss and Chomsky, and Minimalists such as Donald Judd. House X, 1978, is the 'last formalist work' and the 'first use of decomposition which is opposite to a rational transformational process'. The building was designed by subtracting elements and by a

films of Richter and Eggeling') and it leads philosophically to a series of 'dis-s' ('a displacement of man away from the centre of his world').²³ Thus '[Man] is no longer viewed as an originating agent. Objects are seen as ideas independent of man' and therefore they can be dislocated in scale and totally abstract. These ideas dovetail nicely with Roland Barthes and lead Eisenman to a new series of rhetorical strategies to represent the loss of centre: *L-shapes*, or 'els', which signify partness and instability, *excavation* which signifies digging into the past and unconscious, *scaling* which results in decreasing or increasing an element successively to non-human proportion, and *topological geometry* which provides an alternative to the more anthropomorphic Euclidean geometry. We will find Eisenman adopting still further methods of decentring, with what could be called his rhetoric machine, but the important point is that each method is based on his metaphysics of nihilism, the *episteme* he presumes underlies the Modern project. (Perhaps it should be mentioned at this point that there was a humanist Modernism, a truth he conveniently overlooks; in any case it is his intention to subvert and deconstruct it.)

House 11a, initially designed for his friend Kurt Forster, now head of the Getty Center, is based on a series of L's which are part above and below ground and also rotated with respect to each other. These eroded

cubes are meant to 'suggest a more uncertain condition of the universe. House 11a takes this condition of uncertainty as its point of departure . . . We live in an age of partial objects . . . the whole is full of holes'.²⁴ From this stage, according to Eisenman, there is a shift in his work towards the bigger scale – he seeks out urban projects – and towards considering the site. The Cannaregio project for Venice, 1978, indicates this shift towards what I would call his 'Non-Post-Modernism', that is, his use of Post-Modern norms in an inverted or Deconstructed way.

Thus responding to Contextualism, he both denies the fabric and history of Venice and asserts the *absence* of Le Corbusier's hospital project for this city, by using its grid as an ordering device. The scheme is a positive bouquet of 'non-s' ('non-mimetic, non-narrative and non-vertebrate') and it takes the decomposed House 11a for its non-scale. This is to be

built as three differently scaled objects. One of the objects is about four feet high, it sits in the square and is the model of a house. You can look at it and think 'well, that is not a house; it is the model of House 11a.' Then you take the same object and put it in House 11a; you build House 11a at a human scale – and you put this same model of it inside . . . the larger object



BERNARD TSCHUMI, PARC DE LA VILLETTE, PARIS, 1983. FOLIES

folies, as a pure intellectual condition which has begun to dominate his work, life and mental state. In the early 80s the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, which he had co-founded, began to deconstruct as he turned his efforts towards a larger practice without altogether extricating himself from its control.²⁶ He became alienated from some of his friends and, for a time, his wife and children. Even his students at Harvard, where he taught from 1983 to 1985, went through traumas of de-stabilisation and momentary withdrawal as he introduced Deconstruction as a practising method.²⁷ After several written attacks on classicism and Post-Modernism,²⁸ he took direct aim at his former friend and ideological enemy, Leon Krier, the exponent of classicism and defender of Albert Speer. Krier's revivalism was dismissed as nostalgic, out of touch with modern science and equated with the anti-Semitism of Speer and other Nazis. As Krier apparently once confessed to Eisenman that the 'homeless Jewish intellectual' was not the starting point of his urbanism, this lapse on his part is once again taken as the authoritarian nature of classicism. 'Any woman', Eisenman said pointing at the audience, 'who subscribes to classicism is self-denying'.²⁹ 'Logocentrism', the favoured sin of Deconstructionists, anthropocentrism, hierarchy, anti-feminism, anti-Semitism and nostalgia were all rolled up together into one paranoid



minimalises the smaller one. Once the object inside is memorialised, it is no longer the model of an object; it has been transformed . . . into a real thing. As a consequence, the larger house, the one at anthropomorphic scale, no longer functions as a house . . . Then there is the third object, which is larger than the other two, larger than reality, larger than anthropomorphic necessity . . . It becomes a museum of all these things.²⁵

One is reminded here of Mozuna's houses-within-houses, his *Anti-Dwelling Box* of 1971, based on *The Mother Goose* rhyme, and Borges' endless library of self-referring books, both examples of an eternal process of self-referentiality.

These devices, later called 'scaling' and 'self-similarity' by Eisenman, decrease the power of the user just as they increase that of the architect and it's not surprising that Eisenman later produced even more solipsistic works, such as 'House El Even Odd' (a pun on House 11a as an odd one) and 'Fin d'Ou T Hou S' (a deconstructed set of puns on 'find out house'; 'fine doubt house' and 'fin d'août' – the 'end of August' 1983, when he designed it). Broken puns and scrambled sense, his psychoanalyst must have assured him, constitute our normal, psychic state.

It is Eisenman's determination to represent this madness, Tschumi's

ball and hurled at Krier. Needless to say this caricature missed its mark and, since it assumed a totalising ideology, was in any case a very non-Deconstructionist act.

Eisenman's scepticism and dislike of the classical has found expression in many recent articles and urban projects.³⁰ Primary among the latter was his winning entry for social housing in Berlin, an IBA project located near the Berlin Wall and Checkpoint Charlie. The traumatic past of this city afforded Eisenman, as it did Hejduk and Libeskind, a good opportunity to represent catastrophes and discontinuities of the past and present: 'Germans killing Germans trying to flee from Germany to Germany' as one circular and mordant proposition put it.³¹ Eisenman's first scheme, produced in 1982, postulated the redevelopment of a whole block with additions (a museum and walkways) and subtractions (an 'artificial excavation' down to 18th-century foundations), but in the event only 37 apartment units were constructed on the southwest corner. His intention here was to provide an alternative to Post-Modern historicism with its emphasis on continuity, wholeness and patching up the fragmented Modern city. This last approach is dismissed as an attempt to 'embalm time', or 'reverse or relive it' – 'a form of nostalgia'.³² Instead Eisenman proposes in a disinterested way a neutralising 'anti-memory', something akin to

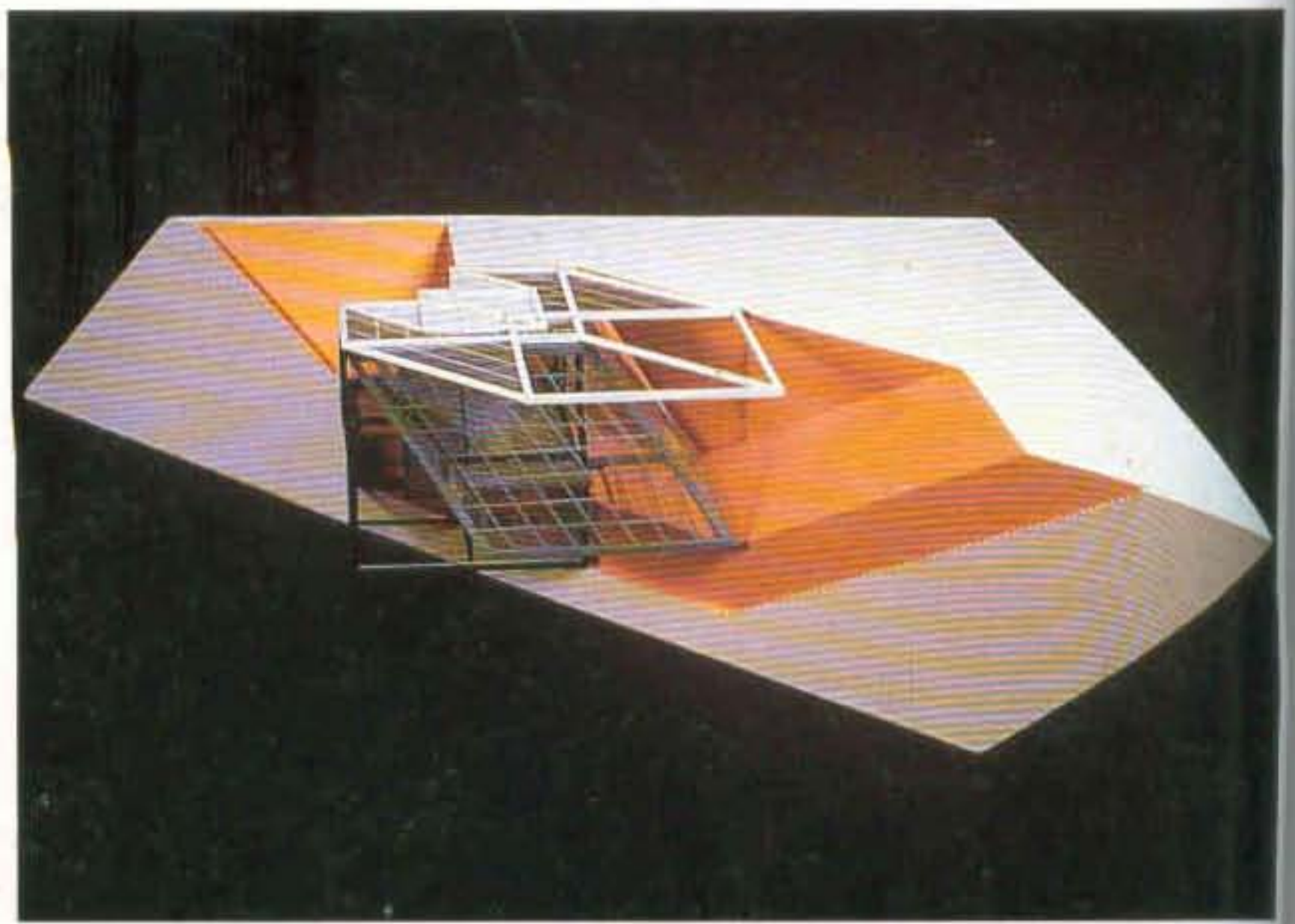
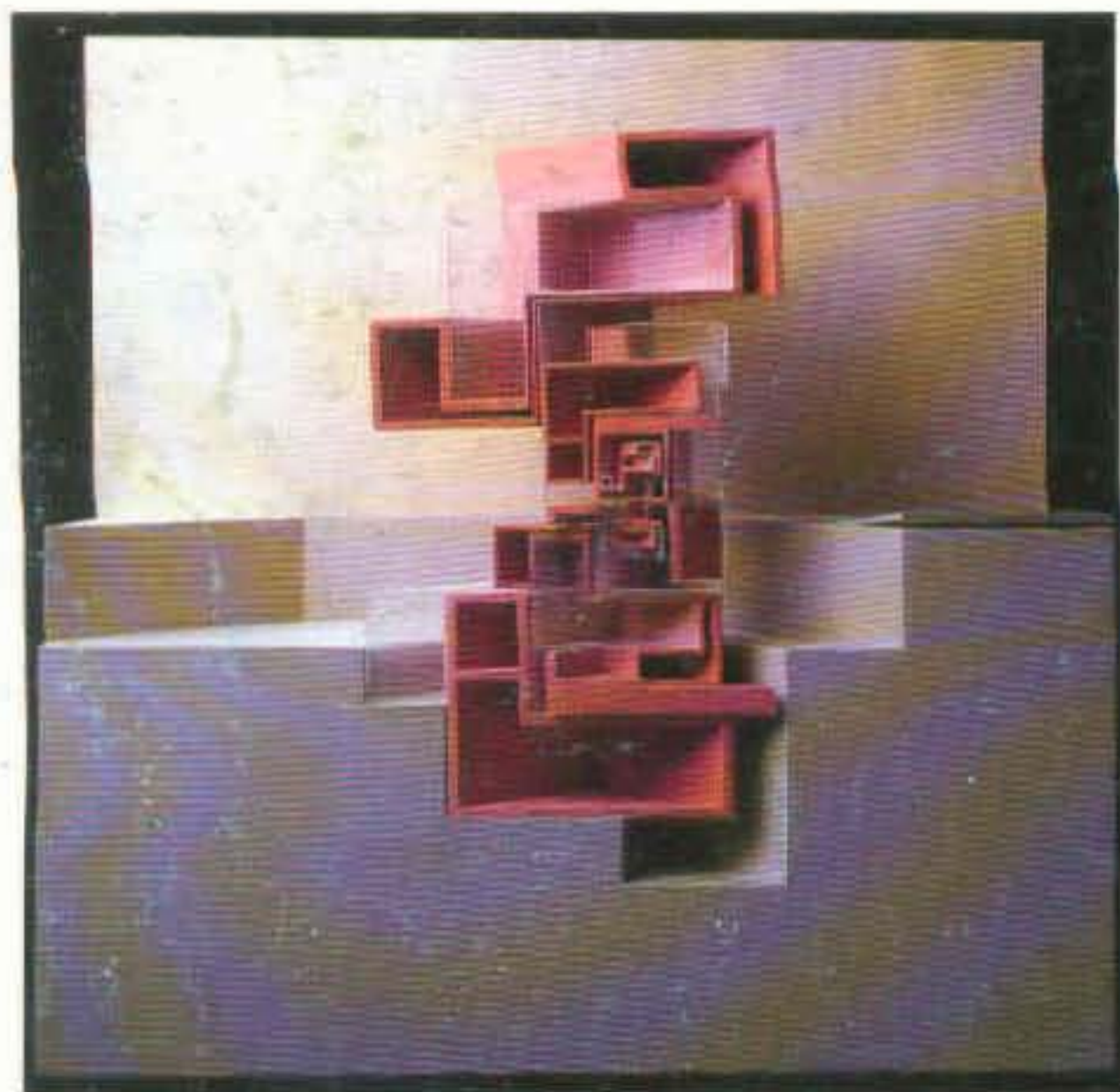
Tschumi's reproduction of the status quo:

Anti-memory does not seek or posit progress, makes no claims to a more perfect future, or a new order, predicts nothing. It has nothing to do with historicist allusion or with values or functions of particular forms; it instead involves *the making of a place that derives its order from the obscuring of its own recollected past.*

In this way memory and anti-memory work oppositely but in collusion to produce a suspended object, a frozen fragment of no past and no future, a place. Let us say it is of its own time.³³ 'Our time', judged from the completed building, is where a light green wall with a white grid *appliqué* represents the remaining buildings on the site, while another grid shifted from the first one by 3.3 degrees represents 18th-century foundations and the Mercator grid, that abstract ordering pattern which 'ties Berlin to the world'. Above all, it represents the Berlin Wall just to the north. In effect then, like Richard Meier's 3.5 degree shifts at Frankfurt, we have a Late-Modernist dealing with a Post-Modern theme, the representation of site requirements. The problem is, however, that no one could possibly know this without reading Eisenman's explanations several times because so much is intentionally obscured and left abstract, without any visual cues or conventions. This 'difficulty' of reading is an essential part of

west corner. There is no semantic reason for this and it seems simply an aesthetic decision, to harmonise the colours and forms of this facade. And such harmonies, banal integrations for Eisenman, are precisely what he seeks to deconstruct in his pursuit of an honest 'anti-classicism'. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the 3.3 metre base is meant to refer to the height of the Berlin Wall, but it is treated as a *glass* wall of cheerful squares, or on the southwest corner, an exercise in perky setbacks. In other words the 'memory' of this, the most traumatic wall in the West, is aestheticised and trivialised, the accusation that Eisenman levels at Post-Modern historicism.

The confirmed sceptic might answer that no Deconstructionist can be perfect; there's always incoherence in the text. So how do we judge the difference between good and bad Deconstructionist building? Again there is no clear answer to this, as Eisenman has said: 'Looking at the corrosion of formal categories, the work [of mine] suggests that there is no such thing as the good or the beautiful'.³⁴ If the work is thus not meant to be 'good', it still remains 'not-bad', either; otherwise I wouldn't write at such length on these tortured inconsistencies. For this is the subject of Eisenman's art, systematic doubt, and it takes considerable effort and courage for him to pursue it. On the other hand, it would be naive not to recognise such scepticism as a reigning fashion



PETER EISENMAN, L TO R: CONTEXTUAL OBJECT FOR CANNAREGIO PROJECT, VENICE, 1980; MODEL OF HOUSE EL EVEN ODD

his theory of the totality – writing/architecture/ world/text – and it makes no concessions to how the inhabitants might 'mis-read' the building if they just look at it or live in it.

However from this man-in-the-street view the fragmentations and destabilisations are very clear. The L-shapes rotate slightly, the tilted block seems to smash through the greenish block to re-emerge on the corner, only then to dissolve its figural identity. This tilted block, in fragmented grids of white, grey and red, provides a welcome synco-pation and identity for each flat: all the windows here vary and the double-storey white grid successfully contrasts with the more predictable rhythms of the background green. In conventional terms it's a delightfully moving set of volumes, lines and coloured grids which provide individuality and anonymity in equal measure, and the skew of grids provides just enough tension to relieve what might have been a ponderously large block. So far, for the man or woman-in-the-street, so good.

But what about the deeper reading for the cognoscenti, the man-with-the-Eisenman-text-in-his-hand, the Empty Man? Here there are problems of inconsistency which cannot be deconstructed away. The greenish grid, which represents the street line and previous buildings, unaccountably changes its colour to the grey-red-white grid on the

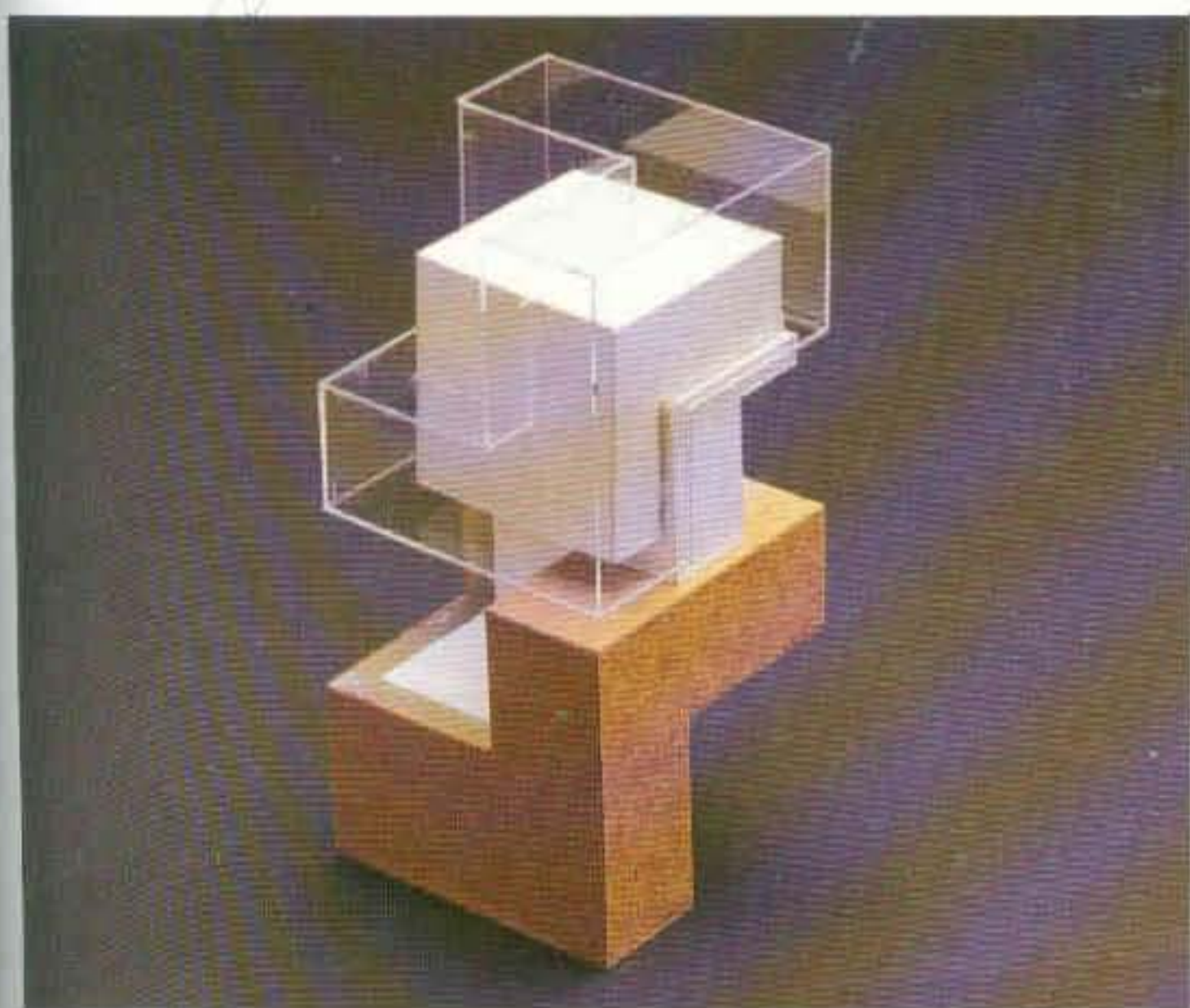
of our time, with graduate schools and Parisian salons full of Doubting Thomases.

Eisenman's winning entry for an Arts Center in Columbus, Ohio, takes his rhetorical strategies a stage beyond the Berlin scheme. Again it is based on the shift between two grids, 'artificial excavation' and complex, fragmented figures – signs of doubt. Again it eschews beauty and harmony for the abstract layering of white and grey grids. Again it exhumes an old building – in this case the foundations of a former armoury – and uses it as a 'fiction' to be built as a 'ghost' tower, another narrative and formal device borrowed from Post-Modernists. But whereas a Post-Modernist might have stitched together past, present and future, Eisenman builds the abstracted fragment of this armoury as a ruin. Red masonry towers built from a new 'non-brick' material tie down a jumble of canted rectangles, one of which, a long white grid of galleries and the main spine, smashes between the existing buildings and then rises up 'like a north arrow', and even more like one of Hadid's skewed flying beams.

Obviously Eisenman has been influenced here, as elsewhere, by other Deconstructionists, and in this sharing of certain conventions we are witnessing the growth of a new convention and set of rules, however short-lived. The long thin rising spine – the skewed box beam

– deconstructs the hierarchies and harmonies of the two rather dull buildings to either side and, like one of Frank Gehry's bumptious wedges driven into a classical cliché, this act of contextual murder brings a certain life to boredom. One may question the frenetically fragmented confusion, but the Arts Center explicitly asked for a building which would represent the experimental nature of contemporary art and in this sense they have achieved their goal: a tilted Sol LeWitt anchored by a Cubist ghost armoury next to an earthwork *à la* Michael Heizer. One may also question the reference of the tilted grid. After all, is the city grid really worth representing, or is it merely a pretext to convince the client that this 13 degree shift and its costly collisions are necessary? As usual Eisenman proffers a set of paradoxes: 'We used the site as a palimpsest: a place to write, erase and rewrite [history]'; 'Our building reverses the process of the site inventing the building [Post-Modernism]. Our building invents the site'. The resurrected, abstracted armoury 'affirms the significance of a major lost landmark on the Ohio State Campus and refers the University to a piece of its own history'.³⁵ But is a destroyed armoury really that important to anyone at the university; was it perhaps once a military academy?

As Eisenman faced such questions of content and introduced new



PETER EISENMAN, L TO R: MODEL OF HOUSE 11A, AXONOMETRIC MODEL OF HOUSE X

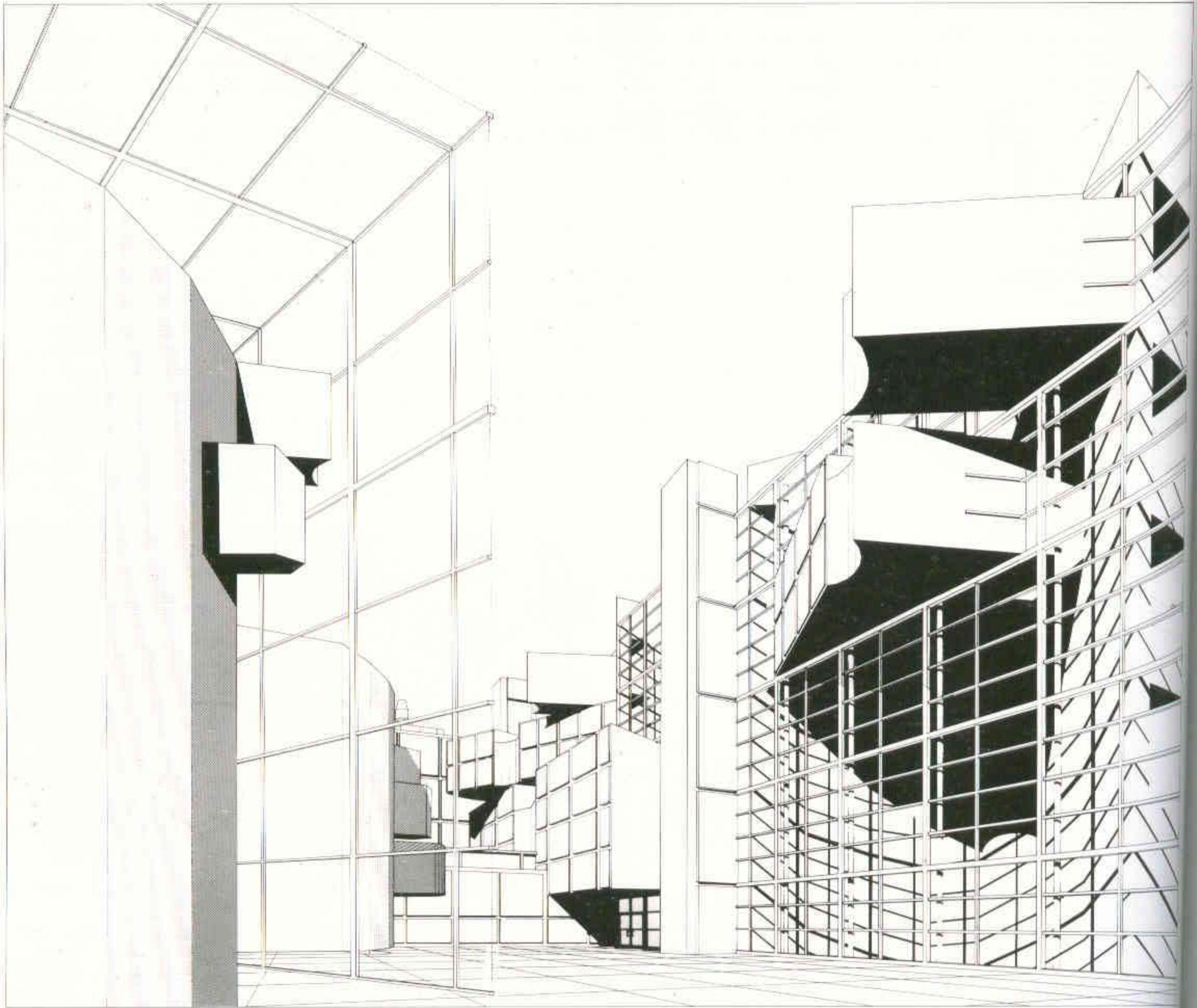
rhetorical tropes into his own armoury – 'fiction', 'anti-memory', 'representation', 'figuration' – he became much closer to the Post-Modernists he spurned. But to save himself from this unspeakable fate, he inverted their primary methods and turned miraculously into a 'Not-Post-Modernist'. Thus for Post-Modern 'simulation' of ruins, for instance, Eisenman proposed a 'dissimulation' of ruins, that is counterfeit excavations and false foundations that either pretend to be real ones, or represent in some phoney material the fact that they're false. One scheme of his, the Romeo and Juliet project for the Venice Biennale, 1985, takes the texts of Da Porto and Shakespeare, among others, as its departure point for showing the inherent conflicts between the two famous families of Verona. It makes this the pretext for a 'superposition' of conflicting scales and endless mis-readings – hence part of its title, 'Moving Arrows, Eros, And Other Errors'.³⁶ 'Scaling', Eisenman's method of amplifying or diminishing a grid or figure so that it relates only to itself ('self-similarity') is the rhetorical figure used and it results, for instance, in a diminished model of the city of Verona being inserted in the citadel of Romeo's castle. So many such shifts and 'superpositions' and 'excavations' are used here that Eisenman quickly loses his privileged role as the author of this text and, in an amusing and revealing admission, says this of its represen-

tation: 'I am the worst person to ask, because it is a very unconscious project for me. It's a very interesting project for my psychoanalyst who thinks it's a very interesting insight into my psychology. He understands it much better than I do, in a certain sense'.³⁷

Since architecture is a public art and Romeo and Juliet will not be built, we'll leave its analysis to others more highly paid for the task. But its extension of previous ideas should be mentioned, the method of layering and cracking glass planes to introduce non-anthropomorphic tropes – 'scaling', 'superimposition' and 'self-similarity'. These, in Eisenman's words, create a 'scale-specificity in that it is a recursive scale: it relates to its own being. Its scale is internal. In this work, we are talking about the loss of God, the lack of belief in the incarnation, and the need for an incarnate mediator. We are talking about the loss of self as the only identifying metaphor... Recursive, self-similar, discontinuous geometry is potentially a scale non-specific to man's geometry'.³⁸

Why the 'need for an incarnate mediator' isn't another vestigial sentiment of 'Post-Modern nostalgia' is not explained; but the absence of God is, of course, the ultimate reference for all this de-centred work. It brings up the point of whether the feeling of loss – so powerful in Tschumi, Hejduk, Libeskind and Eisenman – isn't a form of Nietzsche-

ean, or at least Existentialist, revivalism. Whatever the case, Eisenman and Derrida's garden for Tschumi's 'park of the 21st century' is where all this absence comes together and becomes recursive, referring to itself in a kind of silent ping-pong game of nothingness. First of all there was a cryptic battle going on over precedent: which 'author' – Tschumi with his 'Joyce's Garden' of 1977, or Eisenman with his Cannaregio project of 1978 – first invented the famous Deconstructionist 'point grid', a dispute rendered void in the scholar's mind by Archizoom's 'Non-Stop City' of 1970, or Barsch and Ginzburg's 'Green City' for Moscow, 1930. Eisenman no doubt wanted to take the credit for discovering Le Corbusier's 'point grid' for his Venice Hospital of 1964-5, and this is referred to in the layout of the garden which combines both Le Corbusier's and Tschumi's grid with his own Cannaregio project: its eroded L-shapes, a diagonal cut and positive and negative 'excavations'. In the garden another diagonal is added to pick up Tschumi's and then two grids are rotated at an angle to suggest to the cognoscenti that Eisenman had the idea before his friend (ie Tschumi's Parc is based on Eisenman's Cannaregio). Then the ground plane is tilted at an angle and (perhaps) made from Corten steel (a reference to Hadid's polished rock planes?). This incline deconstructs solid ground and disorients the viewer, who has to observe this topsy-



PETER EISENMAN, BIO-CENTRUM, FRANKFURT, PERSPECTIVE

turdy miniature of the world from outside.

Again the three basic levels represent time: underground excavations, the past; tilted plane, the present; and elevated L's, the future. The 'self-similarity' of the L-shapes further breaks down human scale and reference, but a touch of comprehensible Post-Modern representation is permitted in the fragmented images of the Paris ramparts (elevated) and abattoirs (sunk). These are 'traces' from the site and its history of constant destruction and reconstruction, the most recent being in the 80s when the slaughterhouses were transformed at great political and economic expense (represented by the gold colouring?). Binary oppositions are signified – Parisian abattoir/Italian slaughterhouse (site of the Venice Hospital), Tschumi/Le Corbusier, house/folly, life/death – as well as the simultaneity of past, present and future. The whole garden is called 'Choral Works', a collaboration of Derrida and Eisenman, who sing their sacred and metrical hymn in unison to an audience of knowing Empty Men; other Deconstructionists who will contemplate with reverence their need for an 'incarnate mediator' they cannot have – the pleasures of sacred absence.

Eisenman explains:

The idea of the quarry becomes a very interesting notion. That is what we are using in La Villette. We are using two pieces: the

quarry and the palimpsest . . . Now you take the stones and build one project. Someone else will take the stones from our project and build something else . . . We start from the palimpsest which is the superposition of two pieces [Cannaregio and Tschumi?] which then becomes a quarry and then you subtract from the palimpsest leaving the trace of the former superposition, but also the trace of the subtraction, so in other words we are talking about 'chora'. The combination of the superposition of palimpsest and quarry gives you 'chora' which is the programme that Derrida set for the La Villette project. So we are into some really very crazy things at La Villette . . .³⁹

Eisenman's rhetoric machine seems to have dominated Derrida's programme⁴⁰ – 'excavation', 'palimpsest', 'quarry', 'self-similarity', 'superposition', 'scaling', 'textual figuration', 'dissimulation', 'point grid' and 'ghost representations' – these are the tropes from his armoury which are evident in the garden. His adoption of categories from rhetoric may also have been influenced, unlikely as it is for both of us, by my earlier work.⁴¹ In any case, by 1987 Eisenman was adopting many more terms which generated a Not-Post-Modern ornament – 'catachresis', 'fractals', 'arabesques' and 'grotesques' – and moving towards the paradoxical position of joining the enemy to

was leaving, actually producing an ornamental and representational architecture. Yet several dispositions kept him free of this fate, above all his commitment to abstraction and hermeticism and the Deconstructionist emphasis on continual process, constant change. Like Nietzsche's man of the future he is committed to the restless task of deconstructing and reconstructing all categories of thought and building, and he is becoming more and more aware of the 'giant paradox' this poses for architecture, something that should have a little more permanence than fashion, and something which has a 'presence', as well as a reference to ideas and absence.

By 1987, Eisenman's definition of the 'Rhetorical Figure' asserted that architecture must convey its simultaneous 'presence' (as an existing object) and 'absence in presence' (those things which are 'repressed' by building and destroyed or missing).⁴² In effect, like Derrida's 'affirmative Deconstruction', his positive nihilism makes an expressive virtue of its own fallibilities and destructions. It also conveys the optimism and enjoyment which attend any breaking of habitual categories, the creative exuberance apparent also in the best

work of Gehry, Koolhaas, Hadid and others. If one values Deconstructionists from a sceptical position, as I do, then it is for their inventive freshness, their bringing of new rules and conventions to the tired game of Modernism, for making it truly 'Neo'. If one has doubts about the generality of approach, they concern the 'dogmatic scepticism' which is always sure of the negative results and the anti-political and anti-public nature of the activity. As a Mandarin style Deconstruction is, as Manfredo Tafuri wrote of the New York Five and others in 1974, '*architecture dans le boudoir*'.⁴³ Like a Rococo boudoir it can be sensual and engagingly complex, but it's fundamentally undemocratic. And here is the real contradiction in Deconstruction: in spite of the claims to pluralism, *différance*, 'a war on totality' and defence of 'otherness', this hermetic work is often monist, elitist, intolerant and conveys a 'sameness'. Perhaps, in architecture, this is a result of staring into the Void for too long: it has resulted in a private religious language of self-denial. Because of such suppressions and contradictions one could argue that a real Deconstructionist architecture of variety and humour has yet to exist.

Notes

- 1 See *The Architecture of Frank Gehry, 1964-1986*, exhibition, Walker Art Center and book, Rizzoli, New York, 1986; *Progressive Architecture*, October 1986; *House and Garden* (US ed) award for architecture, August 1987.
- 2 See Thomas S Hines 'Heavy Metal, The Education of FOG' in *The Architecture of Frank Gehry, op cit*, pp 10-11, 16, 18.
- 3 *ibid*, frontispiece.
- 4 See the discussion of the 'Three Glass Incident' in *Investigations in Architecture: Eisenman Studies at the GSD, 1983-5*, Harvard GSD, Cambridge, Mass, 1986, pp 44-5 and 'Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors', *Box 3*, Architectural Association, 1986.
- 5 Frank Gehry in conversation with Adele Freedman, *Progressive Architecture*, October 1986, p 99.
- 6 Notably the Parc de la Villette, 1985, and the Hague City Hall, 1987. They were announced winners one day and semi-finalists later.
- 7 See the large black *Folio* books published for events at the Architectural Association and see *AA Files* 2-14, 1979-1987, for critical articles and reviews.
- 8 Zaha Hadid, 'The Peak Hong Kong', *AA Files* 4, July 1983, p 84.
- 9 *ibid*.
- 10 Jacques Derrida, 'Point de Folie-Maintenant Architecture', *ibid*, p 7. Also printed in *AA Files* 12, Summer 1986, p 65.
- 11 *op cit*, *AA Folio*, pp 4-19, *AA Files* 12, 65-75, translation by Kate Linker.
- 12 Jacques Derrida, *AA Files* 12, p 70.
- 13 Bernard Tschumi, 'La Case Vide', *AA Folio* 8, 1986, p 3.
- 14 Anthony Vidler, 'Trick-Track', *ibid*, pp 20-21.
- 15 Bernard Tschumi, *op cit*, p 26.
- 16 Harold Rosenberg, 'The Orgamerican Phantasy', *The Tradition of the New*, McGraw-Hill, 1965, pp 269-285.
- 17 Rosenberg, *op cit*, p 284.
- 18 See my 'The Perennial Architectural Debate, Abstract Representation', *Architectural Design*, Vol 53, No 7/8, 1983, pp 10-16.
- 19 Hiromi Fujii, 'Architectural Metamorphology: In Quest of the Mechanism of Meaning', *Oppositions* 22, Fall 1980, pp 14-19.
- 20 *ibid*.
- 21 See interview between Peter Eisenman and Carsten Juel-Christiansen, *SKALA*, No 12, October 1987, p 10.
- 22 *ibid*, p 12.

- 23 Peter Eisenman, 'Post-Functionalism', *Oppositions* 6, Fall 1976, pp ii-iii.
- 24 'A Poetics of the Model: Eisenman's Doubt', interview with Peter Eisenman by David Shapiro and Lindsay Stamm, 1981, in *Idea as Model*, IAUS, Rizzoli, New York, 1981, pp 121-5.
- 25 *ibid*, p 123.
- 26 Kenneth Frampton was the Director of the IAUS for several months in 1985 before resigning.
- 27 See *Investigations in Architecture: Eisenman Studies at the GSD: 1983-85*, Cambridge, Mass, 1986, especially articles by Whiteman and Kipnis.
- 28 His attacks on Post-Modernism start with 'The Graves of Modernism', 1979, also see the references in the publication cited in the previous note.
- 29 These remarks by Eisenman were made at an Architectural Association lecture, May 29, 1985.
- 30 'The End of the Classical', 'The Futility of Objects', 'The Beginning, the End and the Beginning Again', or most recently 'Architecture and the Problem of the Rhetorical Figure', in *A+U*, 87:07, pp 17-22.
- 31 For this quote see Susan Doubilet, 'The Divided Self', *Progressive Architecture* 3, 1987, p 82.
- 32 See Peter Eisenman, 'The City of Artificial Excavation', *Architectural Design*, Vol 53, 7/8, 1983, pp 24-7.
- 33 *ibid*, p 26.
- 34 See interview in *SKALA*, note 37, p 11.
- 35 Eisenman quoted in *GSD News*, Cambridge, Mass, Nov/Dec, 1983, p 9.
- 36 Peter Eisenman, 'Moving Arrows, Eros And Other Errors', *op cit*.
- 37 'Interview Peter Eisenman + Lynn Breslin', *Space Design*, 86:03, p 65.
- 38 Quoted in *Investigations in Architecture, op cit*, note 43, p 62.
- 39 'Peter Eisenman + Lynn Breslin', *op cit*, note 53, p 65.
- 40 'If anything he [Derrida] doesn't push me enough', *ibid*, p 64.
- 41 I first spoke on 'Rhetoric and Architecture' at a conference on semiology in Barcelona 1972, also attended by Eisenman. My *Late-Modern Architecture and Architecture Today*, 1982, may have influenced his rhetoric machine.
- 42 Eisenman, 'Architecture and the Problem of the Rhetorical Figure', *A+U*, 87:7, pp 19-20.
- 43 Manfredo Tafuri, 'L'Architecture dans le Boudoir: The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of Language', *Oppositions* 3, IAUS, May 1974, pp 37-62.