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## *Visions' Unfolding: Architecture in the Age of Electronic Media*

*In his continuing attempts to foil conventional and culturally restricted interpretations of architecture, Eisenman explores in this essay the idea of endowing space 'with the possibility of looking back at the subject', a space that cannot be put together in the traditional construct of vision. To that end he takes up the concept, and tactic, of the fold, credited by Eisenman to Gilles Deleuze.*

During the fifty years since the Second World War, a paradigm shift has taken place that should have profoundly affected architecture: this was the shift from the mechanical paradigm to the electronic one. This change can be simply understood by comparing the impact of the role of the human subject on such primary modes of reproduction as the photograph and the fax; the photograph within the mechanical paradigm, the fax within the electronic one . . .

The electronic paradigm directs a powerful challenge to architecture because it defines reality in terms of media and simulation, it values appearance over existence, what can be seen over what is. Not the seen as we formerly knew it, but rather a seeing that can no longer interpret. Media introduce fundamental ambiguities into how and what we see. Architecture has resisted this question because, since the importation and absorption of perspective by architectural space in the 15th century, architecture has been dominated by the mechanics of vision. Thus architecture assumes sight to be preeminent and also in some way natural to its own processes, not a thing to be questioned. It is precisely this traditional concept of sight that the electronic paradigm questions . . .

As long as architecture refuses to take up the problem of vision, it will remain within a Renaissance or Classical view of its discourse. **Now what would it mean for architecture to take up the problem of vision? Vision can be defined as essentially a way of organizing space and elements in space. It is a way of looking at, and defines a relationship between a subject and an object.** Traditional architecture is structured so that any position occupied by a subject provides the means for understanding that position in relation to a particular spatial typology, such as a rotunda, a transept crossing, an axis, an entry. Any number of these typological conditions deploy architecture as a screen for looking-at.

The idea of 'looking-back' begins to displace the anthropocentric subject. Looking back does not require the object to become a subject, that is to anthropomorphosize [sic] the object. Looking back concerns the possibility of detaching the subject from the rationalization of space. In other words to allow the subject to have a vision of space that no longer can be put together in the normalizing, classicising or traditional construct of vision; another space, where in fact the space 'looks back' at the subject. A possible first step in conceptualizing this 'other' space, would be to detach what one sees from what one knows – the eye from the mind. A second step would be to inscribe space in such a way as to endow it with the possibility of looking back at the subject. All architecture can be said to be already inscribed. Windows, doors, beams and columns are a kind of inscription. These make architecture known, they reinforce vision . . .

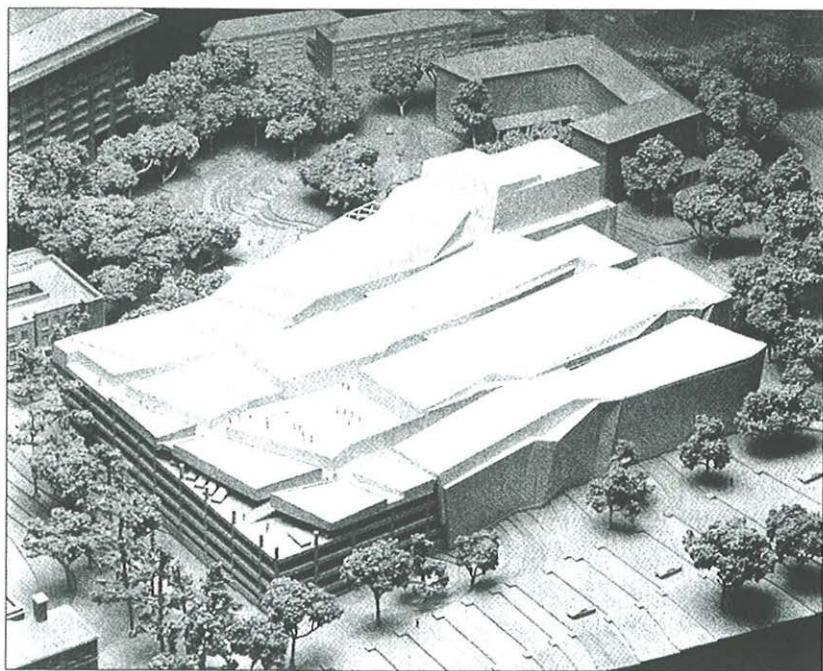
In order to have a looking back, it is necessary to rethink the idea of inscription . . .

Suppose for a moment that architecture could be conceptualized as a Moebius strip, with an unbroken continuity between interior and exterior. What would this mean for vision? Gilles Deleuze has proposed just such a possible continuity with his idea of the fold. For Deleuze, folded space articulates a new relationship between vertical and horizontal, figure and ground, inside and out – all structures articulated by traditional vision. Unlike the space of classical vision, the idea of folded space denies framing in favor of a temporal modulation. The fold no longer privileges planimetric projection; instead there is a variable curvature . . .

Folding changes the traditional space of vision. That is, it can be considered to be effective; it functions, it shelters, it is meaningful; it frames, it is aesthetic. Folding also constitutes a move from *effective* to *affective* space. Folding is not another subjective expressionism, a promiscuity, but rather unfolds in space alongside of its functioning and its meaning in space – it has what might be called an excessive condition or *affect*. Folding is a type of *affective* space which concerns those aspects that are not associated with the *effective*, that are more than reason, meaning and function. In order to change the relationship of perspectival projection to three-dimensional space it is necessary to change the relationship between project drawing and real space. This would mean that one would no longer be able to draw with any level of meaningfulness that space that is being projected. For example, when it is no longer possible to draw a line that stands for some scale relationship to another line in space, it has nothing to do with reason, of the connection of the mind to the eye. The deflection from the line in space means that there no longer exists a one-to-one scale correspondence.

My folded projects are a primitive beginning. In them the subject understands that he or she can no longer conceptualize experience in space in the same way that he or she did in the gridded space. They attempt to provide this dislocation of the subject from effective space; an idea of presentness. Once the environment becomes affective, inscribed with another logic or ur-logic, one which is no longer translatable into the vision of the mind, then reason becomes detached from vision. While we can still understand space in terms of its function, structure and aesthetic – we are still within ‘four walls’ – somehow reason becomes detached from the affective condition of the environment itself. This begins to produce an environment that ‘looks back’ – that is, the environment seems to have an order that we can perceive even though it does not seem to mean anything. It does not seek to be understood in the traditional way of architecture yet it possesses some sense of ‘aura’, an ur-logic which is the sense of something outside our vision. (pp21-24)

Extracts. Source: *Domus*, no 734, January 1992. © Peter Eisenman.



Peter Eisenman, Emory Centre for the Arts, Model of Folding, 1992