The Dissimulation of the Timeless.
Notes on Eisenman's "The End of…"

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In the mid-1980s, in the essay "The End of the Classical. The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," Peter Eisenman put forward for discussion the three recurring categories or classical values under whose influence architecture has been for the last five hundred years, representation, reason, and history, each one having a fundamental purpose. As the expression of an architectural idea, representation was intended to convey meaning through language; reason, or the rational source for design, was meant to embody the ideas of truth and logic; while history, as the continuous narrative of the past shaping the course of architecture, was aimed to recover the idea of timeless.

Challenging this classical paradigm, the author attempted to demonstrate that these well-established values of architecture were in fact nothing other than simulations, concealed illusions that do not recognize their condition as fictions. Firstly, the fiction of representation becomes a simulation of meaning since it has lost its *a priori* source of significance, ceasing to intersect with language. Next, the fiction of reason proves to be a simulation of truth through the message of science, as analysis and reason replace the previous belief in the self-evident universe of values. Finally, the fiction of history reveals itself as a simulation of the timeless due to the loss or rejection of the universal values which used to ground architecture.

With representation, reason, and history being nothing more than simulations, emerges the need and motive for these dominant categories of the classical to be reconsidered. What these fictions show is the fact that "there is no one truth (timeless truth), or one meaning (timeless meaning), but merely the timeless."[1] Meaning and truth, released from the magnetism of simulation, fuse together under the idea of timeless, opening the possibility to separate timelessness from universality.

An *Other* Theoretical Model

Since the essential values of the classical model have proven to be mere simulations, Eisenman wonders what the alternative model for architecture can be. Hereinafter referred to simply as the "not-classical," his theoretical model[2] proposes the shift from simulation to dissimulation. Inspired by Baudrillard's interpretation of the terms "simulation" and "dissimulation," Eisenman borrows these notions and tailors them to fit his argument. According to Baudrillard, dissimulating implies feigning not to have what one has, being synonymous to masking, whereas simulating means feigning to have what one has not, thereby challenging the difference

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1   Peter Eisenman, "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," *Perspecta* 21 (1984): 164.

2   In fact, Eisenman does not believe in our capacity to conceptualize a new model for the theory of architecture, for which reason he envisages the "not-classical" as a series of characteristics, stating which can *not* be, rather than prescribing what it should be.

between true and false.[3] For Eisenman, however, dissimulation is understood differently: it acknowledges the simulation without distorting the simulacra,[4] in a way similar to a mask (a device of pretending to be *not* what one is, without obliterating what is behind it). Dissimulation is not the opposite of simulation; it is only *other* than.

The proposal of the "not-classical" thus attempts to embody architecture as an *other* fiction – which recognizes its fictionality – free from the influence of the classical values of representation, reason, and history, as well as from the ideas of "presentness" (the contingent value of the *zeitgeist*) or universality (the eternal value of the classical):

> "When the possibility is raised that the timeless can be cut adrift from the timeful (history), so too can the timeless be cut away from universality to produce a timelessness which is not universal."[5]

The aim of the model becomes therefore *the reconstruction of the timeless*.

The Reconstruction of the Timeless

To understand the reason and nature behind this reconstruction, one must be familiarized with the evolution of the concept of timeless regarding architecture. According to Eisenman, the need to recover the idea of timelessness emerged in the mid-fifteenth century when architecture started to seek its justification in the past (antique world), becoming obsessed with the idea of temporal origin. Paradoxically, the source of timelessness became then the concept of history. Through history, architecture aspired to recover the idea of timeless from the idea of change. Before that, art and architecture were divine in nature and therefore unbound to past or future — timeless.

The nineteenth century changed that paradigm of the timeless by introducing the concept of *zeitgeist*. With its contingent value, the ideology of *zeitgeist* bound architecture (with cause and effect) to the present by obliterating any reference to history and the past. Timelessness, limited to the present, became then presentness, leaving behind the universal, eternal value of the classical. As proved by the twentieth century, "the illusory timelessness of the present brings with it an awareness of the timeful nature of the past," generating the paradox of the "simulation of the timeless through a replication of the timeful."[6] In this key, Eisenman wonders how it could be possible for architecture to determine a timelessness of its present, while still being a part /a continuation of history. This redundancy calls for another paradigm.

Let us, first off, dwell upon the idea of presentness. "The End of the Classical…" presents us with a self-implied understanding of the term. Presentness is seen as an aspiration to timelessness isolated in the present, with no *a priori* relation to the past. It is the mark of the contingent value of the "spirit of the age" as opposed to the absolute value of the classical. No other account of the concept is given. A decade later, Eisenman directs again his attention to this term and discusses it extensively. Presentness is supposed to combine "both the idea of time in presence, of the experience of space in the present, while at the same time its suffix *–ness* causes a distance between the object as presence, which is given in architecture, and the quality of that presence as time, which may be something other than mere presence."[7]

This definition, by virtue of the word "other," addresses beautifully the alternative model of the "not-classical." It becomes clearer that the dissimulation which Eisenman proposes in "The End

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3   Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glazer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 3.

4   Eisenman, "The End of the Classical," 167.

5   Ibid., 164.

6   Ibid., 163.

7   Peter Eisenman, "Presentness and the 'Being-Only-Once' of Architecture," in *Deconstruction Is/In America: A New Sense of the Political*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 140.

of the Classical…" — what is not the negative of simulation, merely *other* than — is in fact situated in a timeless space, in a present without a relation to either future, or past.

Moreover, presentness is understood as a "being-only-once"[8] unique to architecture, which requires a subversion of instrumentality (function, form, meaning) that may turn architecture into a "trace of presence within presence."[9] In this way, a specific and momentary (i.e., occurring at a defined moment of time) transformation of architecture (the trace of presence) may perpetuate its presentness over time, allowing deconstruction. Architecture's iterability thus plays an important role in understanding presentness as "a temporality in which architectural objects are dislocated and internally split."[10]

Eisenman's concept of presentness evolves in such a way that, in a subsequent study, he even links it to the idea of passion manifested by an author/architect and structured as an instant in time.[11] More recently, while addressing the relation of the contemporary architect to history and time (under the concept of lateness), he identifies an undeniable untimeliness and a temporal ambiguity of the architectural work which can "adhere to the present through disjunction, i.e., through critique and interrogation."[12] Although he does not call it presentness, it is interesting to note the similarities between it and the idea of lateness — as the concept envisaged to explore a new way of approaching architecture, overcoming historicism and any *zeitgeist*.

What we comprehend so far is that if neither the universal value of timelessness (bound to historicism), nor the ephemeral value of presentness (dominated by the modern *zeitgeist*) supports a viable model for architectural creation anymore, then a new paradigm is required. This paradigm of the "not classical" (defined rather by what cannot be than by what must be), continues to revolve around the idea of timeless, attempting to reconstruct it. "In order to reconstruct the timeless," Eisenman declares, one must "begin by eliminating the time-bound concepts of the classical, which are primarily origin and end."[13]

Over time, history (and more recently reason) has played a paramount role in conditioning the origins of a work. Whether divine, natural or functional, any *a priori* origins of architecture are thought to constrain and influence the process of creation. By dismissing these universal values, the process is liberated, leaving room for another fiction, one that is arbitrary. The "not-classical" origins become artificial and relative, being reinvented for each circumstance and adopted for the moment. They are simply starting points which contain the motivation for the beginning of a process.

This does not mean that history *per se* is dismissed from the creative process. Eisenman has identified the limitations brought by the classical tradition (in terms of depending on history to support creation), as well as those brought by the Modern Movement (regarding the negation and rejection of history). For him, history is still viable as an arbitrary fiction provided it is critical. "History, not as a narrative, nor as a progressive historicizing agent, is capable of being used as a critical construct, in an approximation of a non-metaphysical, non-dialectic condition of origin."[14]

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8   Eisenman borrows this concept from Derrida who discusses the issue of the "being-only-once" of a work of art (painting, photography). Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

9   Eisenman, "Presentness," 144.

10 Michael Hays, *Architecture's Desire. Reading the Late Avant-Garde* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2010), 59.

11 "If there is such a moment as presentness in architecture, perhaps it can be outlined by self, language, and now passion." Peter Eisenman, "Passion and the Moment of Architecture," in *Written Into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990-2004*, ed. Peter Eisenman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 11.

12 Peter Eisenman, *Lateness* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), 100.

13 Eisenman, "The End of the Classical," 167.

14 Peter Eisenman, "The futility of objects: Decomposition and the Process of Difference," *The Harvard Architecture Review* 3 (1984): 67.

In a more recent interview, remembering the European architectural tour from the summer of 1960, which he took with Colin Rowe, Eisenman revealed his relationship towards history (understood as education). In the architectural work, history should be integrated and manipulated, in order to become of the present.[15] This vivid relationship with history is one of his most important lessons in architecture and one that he continues to pass on to his students.[16] In fact, Pier Vittorio Aureli considers this attitude towards history as the fundamental aspect in the design and theoretical work of Eisenman. He calls it "historic awareness," meaning that besides being a customary practice, history may still derive from a critical consciousness, thus having the capacity to both express and explain the world.[17]

One must not forget the context of "The End of the Classical…" and the fact that most of Eisenman's judgements and resolutions proposed in this study are strongly influenced by the postmodern spirit: the attitude towards history, perceived as isolated fragments ready to be recomposed; the idea of deconstruction as an arbitrary way for the creation of meaning; the relationship with time, released from the idealized past and an ideal future. However, some of these resolutions and opinions stand the test of time, being reaffirmed, or echoed in subsequent studies, such as Eisenman's approach towards history recently incorporated into the concept of "lateness." One of the main qualities of lateness resides in its capacity to interrogate the dominant tropes of history instead of rejecting them; the historical displacement of conventions determines the spatial-temporal contingency of lateness doubled by its temporal ambiguity (looks both backward and forward in time).[18] That is, instead of rejecting history or reiterating it, one can transform interrogations of the past into interrogations of the present in an undeniable untimeliness. Although this may seem slightly different from the idea originally presented in "The End of the Classical…," in essence, it conveys the same message. In fact, Daniel Libeskind has noticed it in Eisenman's approach even from the 1980's: "history is no longer conceivable as a stream of types or of signifiers but as a participation in an ongoing process of presentness having no future."[19] It is interesting to note that history, from being the source of timelessness (in the classical model) becomes part of the ongoing process of presentness, radically changing the relationship between architecture and time.

Returning to the idea of the "not classical," the attempt to reconstruct the timeless is characterized not only by the elimination of the concept of origin, but also by that of end. The concept of end needs to be understood as purpose or the reason for which a thing exists, rather than a temporal limit which indicates a termination of existence. If the goal of the classical was a causal strategy based on addition or subtraction from an origin, with the rejection of any *a priori* origins, the "not classical" becomes an open-ended tactic based on modification — "the invention of a non-dialectical, non-directional, non-goal oriented process."[20] And because the origins of the "not classical" become relative and arbitrary, simply bearing the motivation for the beginning of a process, it is precisely this motivation that can lead to ends different from those envisaged by the classical.[21]

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15 Peter Eisenman and Colin Rowe, "Interview with Peter Eisenman: The Last Grand Tourist: Travels with Colin Rowe," *Perspecta* 41 (2008): 138.

16 In the same interview he recalls the moment when, sitting in front of a Palladian villa, Rowe taught him to see as an architect: "Sit in front of the façade until you can tell me something that you can't see. In other words, I don't want to know about the rustication, I don't want to know about the proportion of the windows, I don't want to know about the ABA symmetries, or any of those things that Wittkower talks about. I want you to tell me something that is implied in the façade." Eisenman and Rowe, "The Last Grand Tourist," 133. The lesson is to look at history not searching its classical external values, but "reading" its possible independent discourse.

17 Pier Vittorio Aureli, "Manierismus oder die 'Manier' zur Zeit Eisenmans / Mannerism, or the "Manner" at the Time of Eisenman," in *Peter Eisenman. Barfuss auf weiss glühenden Mauern / Barefoot on white-hot walls*, ed. Peter Noeveru (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005), 67.

18 Eisenman, *Lateness*, 95-100.

19 Daniel Libeskind, "Peter Eisenman and The Myth of Futility," *The Harvard Architecture Review* 3 (1984): 61.

20 Ibid., 170.

21 Ibid., 169.

Another study by Eisenman sheds the light upon this situation. "The Futility of Objects" presents decomposition as an alternative process of making, opposed to the processes of composition and transformation which were characterized by the idea of addition or subtraction from an origin. By correlating the two studies (which were in fact contemporary), one reaches the conclusion that the process of modification sustaining the open-ended tactic of the "not classical" essentially refers to decomposition. In Eisenman's opinion, "decomposition presumes that origins, ends and the process itself are elusive and complex rather than stable, simple or pure, i.e., classical or natural," and "decomposition manifests the preserved traces of a process which has no direct relationship to an ideal past but only a memory of the past, and a future that is only in the present."[22] In this light, "decomposition" and "the reconstruction of timeless" meet on the same ground: a present condition where past and future are suspended, where origin and end are elusive, and where the arbitrariness produces something *other* than. This idea will be incorporated more than four decades later in the aforementioned concept of lateness.[23]

Without the limitations of origin and end, Eisenman's theoretical model for the reconstruction of the timeless leads to an architecture perceived as a place of invention in which the poetic plays a paramount role. Architecture becomes a "writing," or a "reading event," rather than an image, involving thus a "reader" rather than an observer. Reading implies to apprehend or interpret the meaning, requiring an active, critical engagement, while observing indicates looking or watching with a certain passive detachment. The reader's greatest strength is, according to Eisenman, the disconnection from any *a priori* external values (preconceived ideas of what architecture should be).[24] In this light, the alternative paradigm of the "not classical" is constituted as "an *other* timeless space of invention […] in the present without a determining relation to an ideal future or to an idealized past."[25] It is unconstrained, arbitrary, critical, poetic, leaving room for interpretation.

The Dissimulation of the Timeless — a Contemporary Commentary in Two Examples

In his latest book (published in 2020), Eisenman explores this relationship of architecture with the idea of timeless, while analyzing several examples of modern and postmodern architecture. It is interesting to notice how a concept, or better an attitude born in the 1980's develops and matures for almost four decades and finds its echo in contemporary architecture, as Eisenman's ideas seem particularly suitable for the present context as well. Continuing Eisenman's analysis, what this paper aims to furtherly achieve, is to validate the comeback of the idea of timeless (metamorphosed into lateness) by bringing forward two recently completed projects, Astley Castle (United Kingdom, 2007-2012) and Z33 Museum (Belgium, 2011-2019).

The proposed examples are not intended as applications of Eisenman's theory, since neither of their respective authors explicitly assumes or acknowledges the theoretical model and concepts in discussion. Instead, the projects are chosen as a commentary on the capacity of deconstruction to reposition itself critically within the contemporary professional context. The reason behind this choice follows the deconstructive spirit, by bringing forward independent "readings" of history as an act of critical necessity. Recalling the already mentioned interview with Peter Eisenman and Colin Rowe, the present paper attempts to achieve the same result sought by Rowe when asking young Eisenman to sit in front of the façade of the Palladian villa and tell him something that he cannot see.[26] The two chosen examples propose precisely such an exercise of dislocated, timeless interrogation freed from any external values.

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22 Eisenman, "The futility of objects," 185-86.

23 "Lateness emerges when recognizable elements of architecture are decontextualized, creating new relationships within a known language of form." Eisenman, *Lateness*, 96.

24 Eisenman, "The End of the Classical," 171-72.

25 Ibid., 172.

26 See note 16.

Fig. 1: Witherford Watson Mann Architects, Astley Castle, Warwickshire, 2007-2012: Facade view from the churchyard (2019).

A certain spirit in which these projects have been realized recommends them as relevant examples for Eisenman's theoretical model. Marking a recent niche tendency in architecture today, this spirit reveals an attitude of sensitive yet bold intervention, and both projects express with care and a firm stand a propitious relationship with time and history, without focusing on conceptual statements or formal objectives, and without turning it into a simulation. It is about understanding the role of the contemporary architect as part of a history that has been and will continue to be written, seeking to establish a dialogue in the present with the existent in order to lay the foundations of a relationship as promising as possible for the future. In this light, the spirit embodied by the chosen projects may become a commentary on the dissimulation of the timeless acknowledged in architecture today.

The challenge for contemporary architecture is to overcome the modernist paradigm shadowed by the fascination for *tabula rasa*, and instead establish a new and truthful relationship with history. The chosen case-studies are recently completed projects, Astley Castle in Warwickshire, United Kingdom (2012) and the Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture in Hasselt, Belgium (2019). At Astley Castle the contemporary intervention responds to the rests of layered fabric of a building that has grown over several centuries. The Z33 is a new building inserted into the stratified urban context of the Beguinage. Both show a position of deliberate insertion into a temporal continuity with their historical context in a way that establishes new relationships between the elements of the past and the present and leaves open possibilities for the future.

While the selection of the two case studies was based on the identification of timeless approaches when intervening in historically stratified contexts, another reason for it was to explore these relationships not only at an architectural, but also at an urban scale. Thus, Witherford Watson Mann Architects add a new layer that is in continuity with the existing on an architectural scale at Astley Castle, whereas Francesca Torzo does so on an urban scale with the Z33. In doing so, they both suggest an attitude of lateness that creates timelessness at any scale.

Even though the two examples are clearly detached from the context into which they are inserted, they do not manifest themselves in contrast to the existent, but in dialogue, one that allows all layers to be read. That is, they seek to create unity with the context through dialogue, and to overcome the modern paradigm guided by the idea of radical contrast. This creates new relationships between the past and the present capable of enriching the context with new possibilities for the future. The dialogue established by these two projects with their surrounding makes them timeless.

Astley Castle – Witherford Watson Mann Architects (2007-2012)

Located near Nuneaton in Warwickshire, United Kingdom, Astley Castle had been inhabited for more than eight centuries when it was devastated by fire in 1978. Its complex identity lies in a multilayered structure, consisting of an early medieval fortified core with several successive extensions during the 15th and 17th centuries. After three decades of exposure to the elements, Astley Castle was reduced to a ruin in an advanced state of decay "like a rotten tooth, its outer faces continued to resist, while the inner core crumbled."[27] In 2006 the Landmark Trust, a building conservation charity, initiated a competition inviting twelve architecture practices to propose a scheme for a self-catering holidays house. As the full restoration of the ruin to its former state was too expensive, the competition brief required instead just saving the most important parts.

The winning scheme by Witherford Watson Mann Architects inhabited the ruin in its oldest part, binding and strengthening the "ragged masonry shell" into a new architecture: "We used the contemporary structure to stabilize the ruin, the outer walls which wanted to naturally fall apart. The new brickwork and the precast concrete binds all that together back into a stable shell."[28] (Fig. 1)

The big question concerned the cohabitation of a contemporary building with the old and remarkable remains of the eighth century multilayered structure. Although the conservation of the traces and scars caused by the traumatic event of the fire raised a constant awareness of the catastrophe, it was hesitantly accepted by the Landmark Trust, since it made the project look like a broken figure.[29] Witherford Watson Mann's approach was deliberately positioned between the pure conservation of the ruin and its full restoration: "we have avoided completing or domesticating the remains, leaving the house at Astley open ended and somehow unsettling."[30] The idea of an open end, unconstrained by values or strategies, reminds of Eisenman's process of modification which characterizes the reconstruction of the timeless.[31] As opposed to composition or transformation, modification involves the arbitrary, being non-directional and non-dialectical.

The intervention at Astley Castle was focused on restoring the stability of the ruin using the minimum of means, without trying to achieve a predetermined formal objective. Furthermore, the project embraced the open-ended approach displaying formal incompleteness and celebrated fragmentation, features which recall precisely of Eisenman's understanding of historical contingency by interrogating the dominant tropes of the era instead of rejecting them.[32] In support of his recent theory of lateness (which actually re-embodies his theoretical model of the "not classical"), he takes as his first example Adolf Loos' Villa Karma, an intervention on an existing building in which Loos left the original architectural object untouched and enveloped it

27 William Mann, "Inhabiting the Ruin: Work at Astley Castle," first published in *ASCHB Transactions 35, Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings* (2013). http://www.wwmarchitects.co.uk/site/assets/files/1225/inhabiting_the_ruin_wwm.pdf (last accessed: 6 June 2022).

28 Interview with Stephen Witherford: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR8vOlqOL4Q (last accessed: 6 June 2022).

29 Ibid.

30 William Mann, "Inhabiting the Ruin: Work at Astley Castle," 2016, 9. http://www.wwmarchitects.co.uk/site/assets/files/1225/inhabiting_the_ruin_wwm.pdf (last accessed: 6 June 2022).

31 Eisenman, "The End of the Classical," 170.

32 Eisenman, *Lateness*, 95.

Fig. 2: Witherford Watson Mann Architects, Astley Castle, Warwickshire, 2007-12: View from the Northwest (2019).

Fig. 3: Witherford Watson Mann Architects, Astley Castle, Warwickshire, 2007-12: South court with dining table and fireplace (2019).

with four new, different façades. In a similar spirit, Witherford Watson Mann Architects inhabit the core of the ruin, while leaving the existing shell intact and legible. Whereas in Villa Karma the new façade introduced irregularities into the symmetrical system of the existing structure and destabilized the architectural object (which, according to Eisenman, is a characteristic of lateness), in Astley Castle regularity is introduced into the irregular system so that all the fragments are bound together by the strong core.[33] The new relationship established by the contemporary elements and the century-old ruin aiming to consolidate it on a structural and semantic level are those "that allow the work to look both forward and backward in time,"[34] proposing thus a timelessness opened to past and future. (Fig. 2)

A careful, critical reading of the ruin reveals surprising spatial situations: "[The] ruin is an ambivalent figure [...] it is both anti-architecture and pure architecture. Decay strips away all that is superficial or ornamental, leaving only a structure in fragile equilibrium."[35] Former rooms, such as the fireplace room, where the inside has become outside are preserved to be used as such, while the fire can continue to burn under the starry sky on special occasions. (Fig. 3)

Witherford Watson Mann Architects see their intervention in a continuity of layers from the past, the present and the future. This vision coincides with Aldo Rossi's notion of time when studying the transformations of the urban fabric. In Rossi's vision "the unwritten whole does not drive the form, and the stubborn wholeness of the parts represents the uncompromising attitude of lateness."[36] The Astley Castle project demonstrates a certain dissimulation of the timeless by proposing an architecture that presents itself as a "reading event" in which fragments of history are engaged in the story of the building.

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33 Ibid., 29.
34 Ibid., 23-24.
35 Mann, "Inhabiting the Ruin," 5.
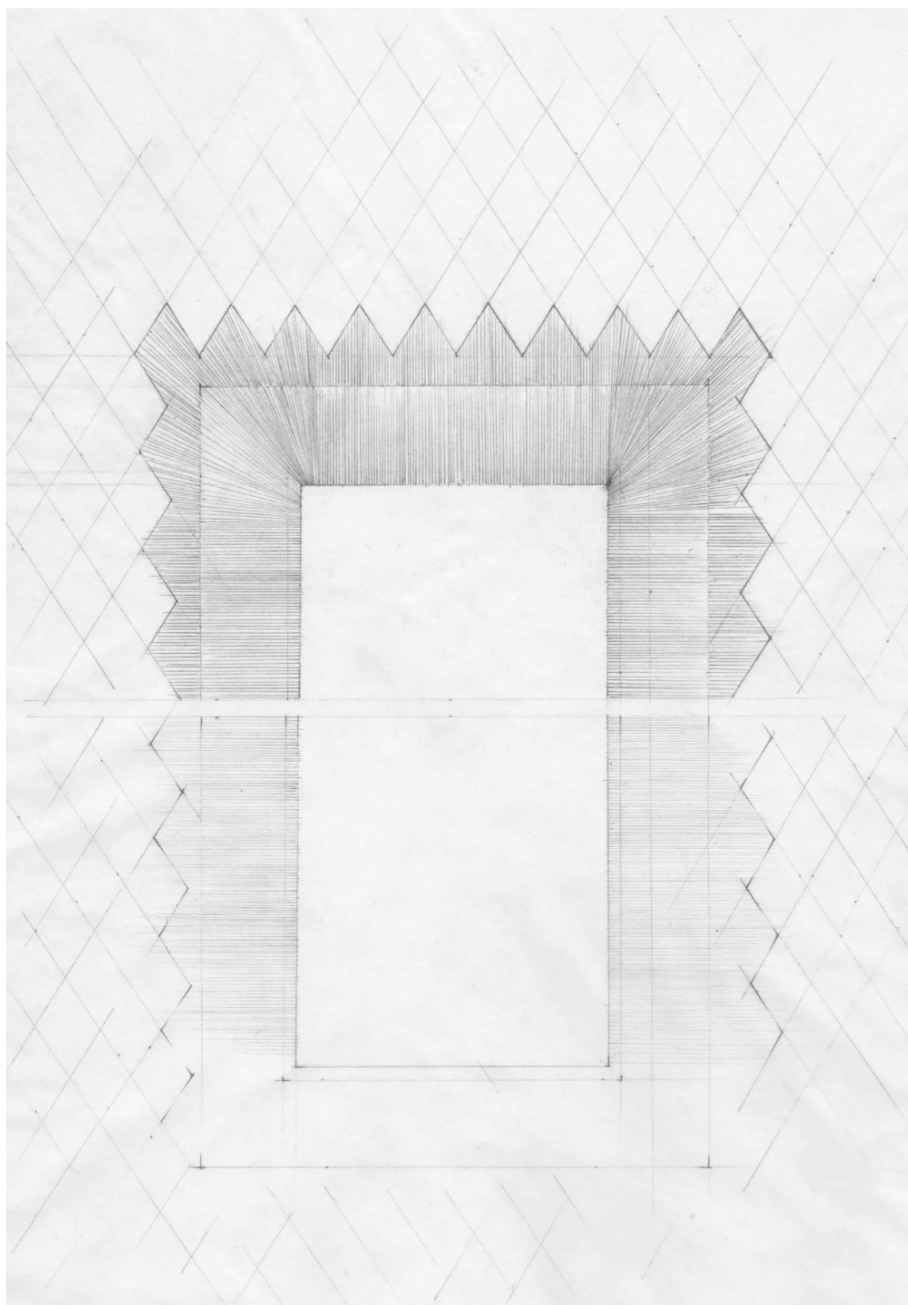36 Eisenman, *Lateness*, 61.

Fig. 4: Francesca Torzo, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, 2011-2019: Brick facade sketch.

Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture – Francesca Torzo (2011-2019)

Located in the downtown of the Belgian city of Hasselt, the urban block of the former *beguinage* (a lay religious order for women) dates back to the 18th century. The triangular shape of the block, framed by low terraced houses with almost entirely windowless façades towards the street and grouped around a church in a garden, reveals the introverted character of the structure. Bombing during the Second World War destroyed a significant part of the beguinage and the church. The site was reoccupied in the post-war period by a school and an art gallery.[37] On the occasion of the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, artistic facilities were built throughout the country as a measure of decentralization. Gustaaf Daniël's exhibition hall Wing 58 (1958-1959) was inserted into the eastern edge of the beguinage and became the home for the Z33 Museum of Contemporary Art, Design and Architecture in 2002. After the adjacent school's relocation, Z33 was extended with Wing 19 (2011-2019), which emerged from a competition won by Italian architect Francesca Torzo who delicately and courageously accomplished the insertion of new volumes in *opus reticulatum* brick walls.[38]

The first element that stands out is the facade. From a distance, the 60-metre-long wall conveys enclosure; approaching it, the wall invites interaction. Tactility is a feature that stems from complex research during the design process and makes the façade resemble a living skin. (Fig. 4) The texture of the façade is reminiscent of the ancient Roman *opus reticulatum*, transferred to handmade dark purple square bricks laid diagonally: "Redolent of Roman methods of construction, the treatment imbues the facade with a determinedly antique quality but is realized with a precision and delicacy that also brings to mind Semper's conception of the facade as a form of built fabric."[39] The massive appearance of the whole is in contradiction to the softness of the texture: the architect herself tested the surface by resting her cheek on it.[40] Apart from their texture and pattern, the diamond-shaped bricks are an integral part of the load-bearing wall and thus not just a decorative element. These elements contribute to the timeless character of the building, as no stylistic or formal research dominates. It is interesting to note that Torzo does not try to simulate the matter of the existent. Her façade is a dissimulation (in the sense of Eisenman's theoretical model of the "not classical"): it interrogates the past and opens a dialogue with it but does not pretend to merge with it by over glorifying it, nor to deliberately contrast it by rejecting it.

By closing the front in a relatively opaque way, the Z33 reinforces the introverted character of the beguinage ensemble and takes a strong position in the urban context. On an architectural scale it takes the role of an element that is both porous and reflective, mediating between the city and the garden. Through her intervention, Francesca Torzo strengthens the "quality as an enclosed public space — an intimate yet collective *hortus conclusus*."[41] (Fig. 5) However, as both the street and the garden are public spaces today, albeit with slightly different degrees of exposure and intimacy, the architectural element incorporates the formerly introverted urban character of the beguinage to preserve its memory. In this sense it acts as a reflective element, while leaving its thresholds crossable. Herewith it demonstrates another characteristic of Eisenman's lateness, which "is an interrogation into the relationship between elements, a questioning of the in-between."[42] (Fig. 6)

37 Ellis Woodman, "Z33 House for Contemporary Art revives with antique Roman textures," *Domus* 1042 (2020), https://www.domusweb.it/en/speciali/guest-editor/david-chipperfield/gallery/2020/01/10/z33-house-for-contemporary-art-hasselt.html (last accessed: 6 June 2022).

38 Marco Biraghi, *Questa è architettura. Il progetto come filosofia della prassi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021), 169.

39 Woodman, "Z33 House for Contemporary Art revives with antique Roman textures."

40 Video, *Wing 19 – A new building by Francesca Torzo for Z33* (2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_BFE7EeVWs (last accessed: 6 June 2022).

41 Bie Plevoets and Shailja Patel, "Z33 Hasselt: Hortus Conclusus as a Model for an Urban Interior," *Interiority* 4.1 (2021): 89.

42 Eisenman, *Lateness*, 81.

Fig. 5: Francesca Torzo, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, 2011-19: View from the beguinage garden (2021).

Fig. 6: Francesca Torzo, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, 2011-19: View through two of the patios (2021).

In the future, the entire beguinage will be repurposed for the Faculty of Arts and Architecture and thus inhabited by a completely different character, so that the trace-memory of the site's former identity will be passed on to future generations through the present intervention, the Z33. Still, the building expresses a totally contemporary stance, while incorporating an awareness of the past filtered through its contemporary attitude that opens possibilities for its future.

Integrated into a continuity of overlapping layers from different epochs that enter a dialogue and form a unity, the intervention distinguishes itself as timeless due to its temporal ambiguity of focusing neither on the values of presentness, nor the ones of universality.[43] It appears as an independent discourse which has naturally integrated both past and present, looking simultaneously backward and forward in time.[44]

As for the interior, the sequence of rooms echoes the spatiality of the beguinage without replicating it, but creating an almost metaphysical, introverted promenade that connects to the outside from time to time. The different exhibition rooms are individually designed and therefore have different proportions in floor plan and section, creating a unique spatial situation that influences the visitor's perception. Francesca Torzo recognized the qualities of the 1958 exhibition hall and opened a dialogue with the existing exhibition spaces. This establishes a unified discourse throughout the building and the two generations of buildings, Wing 58 and Wing 19, thus achieve common ground despite the 60-year time gap.

Concerned with the timeless character of a work (embodied in this case by the concept of lateness), Peter Eisenman suggests to avoid "rejecting the rules of history through the capricious invention of new forms," and to return "to the dominant conventions of the era in order to interrogate their internal formal relationships."[45] The Z33 extension does not present itself as

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43 Eisenman, "The End of the Classical," 165-66.

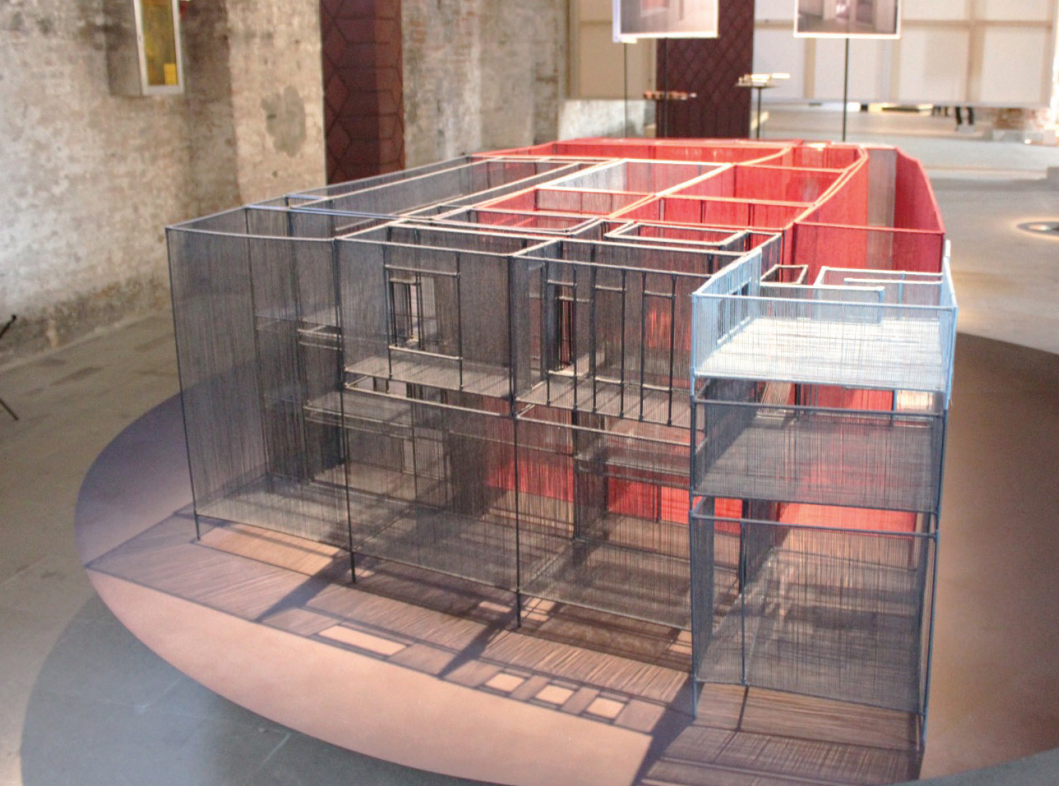44 Eisenman, *Lateness*, 99-100.

45 Ibid., 93.

Fig. 7: Francesca Torzo, Z33 House for Contemporary Art, Hasselt, 2011-2019: Woven model for the 2018 Venice Biennale (2018).

an icon that stands in sharp contrast to its surroundings, like many museums built in recent decades.[46] Even though it is the exact opposite of a "Bilbao effect," a certain "Hasselt effect" can be observed, as the building becomes a kind of architectural icon of the city, conveying values like sensitivity and care in reading the built environment and courage to engage in dialogue. In this way, the Z33 proposes a different kind of public space, one that is more oriented towards the mediation of cultural and social spaces.

Francesca Torzo comments upon the relationship with history in her design process by talking about "a continuous recomposition of wholeness through fragments […] We cannot replicate what has been done in history but we can have a dialogue."[47] (Fig. 7) Eisenman himself sees history as a critical construct which pairs best with an alternative process of making, i.e. decomposition.[48] Revealing her conception, Torzo emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the intertwined relationships that may open a further relation with something else.[49] In doing that, she becomes a "reader" that transcends the immediate meaning of the building, looking *beyond* its boundaries.[50] Returning to Eisenman, "the competence of the reader (of architecture) may be defined as the capacity to distinguish a sense of knowing from a sense of believing. […] the new competence comes from the capacity to read *per se*, […] and more importantly, to know how to read (but not necessarily decode) architecture as a text."[51] With Z33, Francesca Torzo demonstrates her capacity as a "reader" of architecture, producing not only a coherent intervention, but also a timeless one, equally looking to the past and future.

46 Plevoets and Patel, "Z33 Hasselt," 88.

47 Lecture by Francesca Torzo, *A tale of times, people and spaces*, The Stockholm Association of Architects, 26.11.2021, min. 08:07. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgtjJMkpTrI (last accessed: 6 June 2022).

48 Eisenman, "The futility of objects."

49 Torzo, *A tale of times*.

50 Biraghi, *Questa è architettura,* 169.

51 Eisenman, "The End of the Classical," 172.

Conclusion

Revisiting Eisenman's concept reveals not only a potential theoretical model to replace permanence but also the recognition and validation of certain attitudes and approaches in contemporary architecture. It is fascinating how a postmodern concept can still be pertinent after almost four decades of crystallization, and moreover, how it seems even more relevant to the present situation than to the original one. We are facing a significant shift of paradigm; we are forced to react urgently to global climate change, and it is no longer an option (as it was in the 1970s and 1980s when predictions were already being made about what the aftermath would look like), but a constraint. The inevitable rediscovery of the relevance and urgency of re-establishing a relationship with history — which in postmodernism manifested itself rather forcedly by rejecting modernism and reengaging the past — has had time over the last half a century to mature in order to respond critically to this paradigm shift.

More recently, a trend has emerged in contemporary architecture which seems to be inspired by the postmodern understanding of the concepts of time and history. It refers, on one hand, to Aldo Rossi's critical reading of the organism of the city, as a continuous development of overlapping layers, in which the present represents a moment that fits into a continuity of sequences between past and future. The present is just a moment in the life of the city, which cannot ignore the past, but is compelled to interact with it, laying thus the foundations of a relationship prone to developing in the future. Partly following into the steps of Rossi's theory of the late 1960s, the contemporary trend illustrated in this paper seems to respond, on the other hand, to the theoretical model envisaged by Eisenman in the 1980s, according to which the reconstruction of the timeless through a new relation to the idea of time and history can be a solution to understanding and creating architecture. This current attitude starts from the premise of respecting the pre-existent, i.e., the context in which it intervenes, for it is the context that gives information about society, having intrinsic values. Following a critical reading and a thorough understanding of the context, these values — whether historical, cultural, memorial, or social — can be explored and enhanced by the intervention. This does not mean that architectural creation is conditioned by an *a priori* relationship to these values. On the contrary, it is only inspired, finding its motivation in it and aiming to develop a different and timeless space of invention. It recalls precisely the distinction Eisenman makes between the classical and the "not classical."

The idea of timelessness becomes more a matter of stance in architecture, an attitude in the new relationships we establish with what we inherit, what we develop today and what we predict for the future. Timelessness is a principle, not a rule, that ensures success; a guide that, if applied with discernment, can take very different forms and has the ability to adapt from case to case at any scale of intervention.

Finally, timelessness is a dissimulation (and not a simulation), as it does not pretend to conceal history or any anterior reality, nor to over emphasize or glorify it. Instead, it attempts to "read" it critically, and transform it into a place of invention acknowledging both past and future without idealizing it. As Thomas Eliot has put it over a century ago, "the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show."[52] This consciousness of the present through the awareness of the past appears as a need for a relationship without which we cannot build for the future. In part because of the climatic conditions, but also because of the genuine need for authenticity in defining and strengthening our contemporary identity, and for a meaningful relationship to the present, that we can only understand through the perspective of the past.

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52 Thomas Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Perspecta* 19 (1982): 38.

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ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

Fig. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6: The private collection of Florina Pop.

Fig. 4: *The Architectural Review* 1469 (March 2020): 123.

Fig. 7: The private collection of Maria Elena Pătru.