

# Derrida and/on Husserl

## The ›In-Betweens‹ of Sense Formation and their Expression in Eisenman's and Libeskind's Architecture

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**Abstract** *This contribution deals with the problem of the various ›in-betweens‹ of the sense formation process present in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Jacques Derrida's critique of the ideality of sense by his notion of *différance*, and their architectural expression. These cleavages fundamentally concern the hiatus between the ideality of sense and the indeterminacy of sensuous experience. In short, we encounter the ideality of a telos, which the sensible cannot attain, and the ideality of an *arché*, which the sensible cannot retrieve. The resulting suspension of meaning and presence takes the form of a built trace, as shown by the works of Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman for Berlin.*

This contribution deals with the problem of the various ›in-betweens‹ of the sense formation process present in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, Jacques Derrida's critique of the ideality of sense by his notion of *différance*, and their architectural expression. These cleavages fundamentally concern the hiatus between the ideality of sense and the indeterminacy of sensuous experience. Regarding the determination of the ideal identity of sense, Husserlian phenomenology requires that we trace its origin by stepping back to its originary foundation (*Urstiftung*). Derrida questions the ideality of the same as presence, by affirming that ideality does not arise from the originary foundation of a new sense – from an *arché* – but rather originates from the eternal return of sense to its

presence, that is, from its presentification. If in this way every *arché* as source of sense as well as its ideal presence are denied, it would follow that sense would be subject to an unending change, so that it must be »re-invented« in each lived experience. Even if we may not subscribe to this Derridean critique, we must concede that there are at least four interrelated cleavages in the Husserlian phenomenology which testify the difficulty in grasping a retraceable *arché* of sense: Firstly, the hiatus between the ideality of sense and its representation. Secondly, the hiatus between sensory and categorial intuitions. Thirdly, the hiatus between the ideality of sense and the sense which exceeds our expectations. Fourthly, the hiatus between the experience of the new and its apprehension by consciousness. In short, we encounter the *ideality* of a *telos*, which the sensible cannot attain, and the *ideality* of an *arché*, which the sensible cannot retrieve. In this connection, Derrida's concepts of »différance« and »effacement« help to rethink this self-givenness of sense as the expression of this reluctant experience. This expression takes the form of a trace, which, neither present nor absent, suspends meaning and full presence, leaving the narrative open: In architecture, such an attempt was undertaken by the architects Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman, who both draw on a dialectic of presence and absence, of representation and abstraction, a dialectic which avoids any synthesis, acknowledging thus the aforementioned cleavages.

### Husserl: ›In-Betweens‹ of sense formation

Husserl treats the problem of the experience of things from the *Logical Investigations* on. In *Ideas I*, he claims that though objects as realities are inadequately given in experience (we perceive them only from a certain perspective), »their perfect givenness is nevertheless predestinated as ›Idea‹ (in the Kantian sense).«<sup>1</sup> This idea doesn't entail an all-encompass-

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1 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten, The Hague 1982, p. 342.

ing view of things, but an overall cognition of the object, which is step by step achieved in the »unendless process of continuous appearing.« Husserl determines this continuum as »infinite on all sides,« that is, as an »all-sided infinity,«<sup>2</sup> in which the object is continuously and harmoniously determined.<sup>3</sup> In a supplementary volume to the *Logical Investigations*,<sup>4</sup> he determines the idea of the continuum and the idea of perfect givenness as the thing in itself, that is, as the idea of a particular reality of the thing.<sup>5</sup> This particular reality of the thing as an ideal of fulfilment should be distinguished from the phenomenal thing, which is never fully given in experience. Hence, we encounter a *disbalance* between the phenomenological field, which is never a priori given,<sup>6</sup> and the contents of our thoughts, the ideas, which result in a surplus in the determinacy of our thoughts with respect to our sensory experience. Here we can locate the first type of already mentioned *hiatus*, that is, the *hiatus* between the *indeterminacy of phenomenological experience and the ideas or concepts* whose determination no sensory intuition can ever attain.

Even though these eidetic abstractions as ideas are based on primary or sensory intuitions, it is still through an »ideational abstraction« that »its [the object's] idea, its universal, is brought to consciousness« in a new categorial act.<sup>7</sup> Here we find the second type of *hiatus*: Although categorial intuitions ground on sensory intuitions, the intuited or perceived object remains inadequately given in experience, continuously striving for a thorough determination, that it nevertheless *does not need not attain*, insofar our intention is fulfilled by an optimal and not perfect de-

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2 Ibid.

3 See Irene Breuer, »Kant und Husserl. Ding an sich und Telos des Erfahrungsprozesses«, in: Antonio Falduto, Hans F. Klemme (eds.), *Kant und seine Kritiker – Kant and his Critics*, Olms 2018, p. 275–292.

4 Husserl, *Hua XX/1. Logische Untersuchungen. Ergänzungsband. Erster Teil. Entwürfe zur Umarbeitung der VI. Untersuchung und zur Vorrede für die Neuauflage der Logischen Untersuchungen* (Sommer 1913), Dordrecht 2002, p. 197.

5 See Rudolf Bernet, *Conscience et Existence*, Paris 2004, p. 161 and *La vie du sujet*, Paris 2004, p. 130.

6 Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Vol. I*, trans. John N. Findlay, London 2001, p. 174.

7 Husserl, *Logical Investigations, Vol. II*, trans. John N. Findlay, London 2001, p. 292.

termination of the perceived thing.<sup>8</sup> This also means that the concept or categorial intuition exceeds the sensory intuition, since perception offers only a rough and indeterminate intuition of the object.<sup>9</sup> However, Husserl did not draw a further consequence of this disbalance: Given that the sensory sense of the perceived thing is submitted to a process of continuous formation during the perceptual process, while its concept remains the same, there is a sensory excess that the concept cannot completely exhaust or grasp. Here we find the *second type of hiatus*: The one *between sensory and categorial intuitions*, which involves an *excess* that is *twofold*: Both types of intuitions exceed one another in different respects.

Husserl's later development of genetic phenomenology distinguishes between the »finished apperceptions« as »ideal possibilities of concordant modes of givenness« characteristic of the static nexuses, and the »constitutive phenomenology« which follows the history of the objects of a possible knowledge and leads them back to their genesis »in original time-consciousness«. <sup>10</sup> Husserl remarks that »the process of perception is a constant process of acquiring knowledge that holds on to what was acquired epistemically in sense.« <sup>11</sup> The experience of the thing proves thus to be a constant and stable place for the emergence or creation of something new, which »can be a slap in the face to all expectation,« because »the event itself may occur without any anticipations (*Vordeutung*).« <sup>12</sup> Thus, »a new ›primordial institution‹, or [...] a primordial impression« arises, since a »moment of primordial originality emerges.« <sup>13</sup> This event can therefore not be traced back to the

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8 Ibid., p. 261. See Irene Breuer, »Husserls Lehre von den sinnlichen und kategorialen Anschauungen. Der sinnliche Überschuss des Sinnbildungsprozesses und seine doxische Erkenntnisform«, in: Christoph Asmuth, Peter Remmers (eds.), *Ästhetisches Wissen*, Berlin/Boston 2015, p. 231–245.

9 Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Vol. II, p. 273.

10 Husserl, *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony Steinbock, Dordrecht 2001, p. 634.

11 Ibid., p. 49.

12 Husserl, *Hua XXXIII. Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)*, Dordrecht 2001, p. 11.

13 Ibid.

fulfilment of any expectations: A new sense exceeds anticipations, so that there is a *hiatus between the ideality of sense and the sense which exceeds our expectations* – the *third type* mentioned at the beginning.

As Husserl argues in *Experience and Judgment*, a new sense overwhelms us as an unexpected event and leads to the »negation« of the old sense, now overlaid by the new one,<sup>14</sup> such that this passive, pre-intentional experience as the process of a new sense formation is separated through a *hiatus* from the active and predicative foundation of new sense that bears the conceptual apprehension and its linguistic expression, which is always *nachträglich*, i.e. retroactive: a new sense really overcomes us as an unexpected event; we experience it before consciousness may grasp it. We *encounter* the new, which awaits our conceptualization. Here we find the *fourth type* of hiatus: the *hiatus between the experience of the new and its apprehension by consciousness*.

In conclusion, we face the radical impossibility for the sensory to attain the perfection of final fulfilment, because, on the one hand, the thing only needs to achieve an optimal and not a perfect determination, and on the other, as Husserl claims later in his *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, everything that appears is surrounded by a certain »empty horizon,« an »emptiness to be filled out,« by which every appearance is a »determinable indeterminacy.«<sup>15</sup> Here, returning to the static analyses, we encounter the *ideality* of a *telos*, which the sensible cannot attain, while in the later genetic period we face the *ideality* of an *arché*, which the sensible cannot retrieve. Both impossibilities are nevertheless not to be considered as a failure of phenomenology but rather as its essential features. What unifies all these different types of ›in-between‹ of sense formation is the acknowledgment that there is a fundamental hiatus between the logical idealities and the essential indeterminacy of our phenomenological experience. Phenomenology is thus characterized by

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14 Husserl, *Experience and Judgment. Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. James S. Churchill, Karl Ameriks, London 1973, p. 90.

15 Husserl, *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. Anthony Steinbock, Dordrecht 2001, p. 42.

both a *surplus of sense of irretrievable origin and an inexhaustibility of perception due to the non-achievability of its telos*.<sup>16</sup>

### Derrida: »In-Betweens« as *différance* and trace

Both in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry*, Derrida questions the ideality of the same as presence which serves as a foundation to the Husserlian distinction between expression and indication. Contrary to Husserl, Derrida holds the entanglement of both, in order to display how every sign is worked through the »*différance*«. Even though Husserl asserts that the ideality of *Bedeutung* of the expressive sign is opposed to the contingency of the indicative sign,<sup>17</sup> ideality, says Derrida, is thought of as a non-actual presence by the subject. In contrast, he emphasizes in the wake of Husserl's *Crisis*, that »absolute ideality is the correlate of a possibility of indefinite repetition« and that ideality »depends entirely on the possibility of acts of repetition.«<sup>18</sup> Ideality depends thus on repetition, because pure ideality concerns an ideal object, which is present as representation (*Vorstellung*)<sup>19</sup> during the act of repetition. Ideal identity depends on repetition, which at its turn, enables the representation of ideality.<sup>20</sup> Ideality does not arise from an originary foundation of a new sense, but rather originates from the eternal return of sense to its presence, that is, from its presentification. If firstly, every *arché* of sense as well as its ideal presence are denied, and secondly, there is no repetition of the same without distortion, it follows that there cannot be any ideal object with invariable identity. Sense is

16 See Irene Breuer, »Husserl and Derrida on the process of sense formation – gaps and excesses«, in: *Horizon* 12 (1) 2023, p. 74–102.

17 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison, Newton Carver, Evanston 1973, p. 53.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

19 Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Lincoln 1978, 64.

20 Derrida, »Force and Signification«, in: *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago 1978, p. 71.

thus subjected to an unending change, such that it must be »re-invented« in each lived experience. This eternal reinvention of sense is nevertheless counterbalanced by the formation of sedimentations of sense, that is, a sense that is grounded on our habitual actions.

Derrida understands this lack of retraceable *arché* of the sensible as the work of an »*arché*-writing« of a trace, which »is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the *différance* which opens appearance and signification.« It is not only the »origin of all repetition, the origin of ideality« but the origin of sense too. This trace, which Derrida locates at the origin of the linguistic system, can be also located at the origin of sense, but only provisionally, since the trace, in Derrida's words, »is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general, which amounts to saying [...] that there is no absolute origin of sense in general.«<sup>21</sup> This is due to the fact that traces as well as sense in general are subjected to »erasure« by oncoming traces or senses. But to say that the difference or trace is originary is »simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin.«<sup>22</sup> From the very beginning, in the »indifferent« dimension of their first impression – a »past« but under erasure<sup>23</sup> or the »primordial absolute«<sup>24</sup> – the trace at the threshold of perception opens a way for the predicative work of conscience. Thus, only retroactively can the signified presence be constituted, only by deferral, *nachträglich*, supplementary, as Derrida states in agreement with Husserl. It is thus the delay which lies in the beginning: a lapse, which according to Derrida escapes temporalization.<sup>25</sup>

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21 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore 1976, p. 65.

22 Ibid., p. 203.

23 Ibid., p. 65.

24 Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Lincoln 1978, p. 153.

25 For critical remarks on Derrida's reading, see Roberto J. Walton, »Permanencia y fluencia en el análisis husserliano de la temporalidad«, in: *Escritos de Filosofía* 14, 1995, p. 310–329 and Rudolf Bernet, »Derrida and his Master's Voice«, in: William McKenna, John C. Evans (eds.), *Derrida and Phenomenology*, Dordrecht 2009, p. 1–21.

*Différance* is thus a play of pure differential traces, which, in analogy to Saussure's linguistic analysis, refer to one another without being united in the spatio-temporal presence. Presence is thus continually deferred, erased as such, reduced to a play of differential traces that articulate themselves into a system, in which the spatio-temporal distancing between traces is neither presence nor absence.

### Derrida and ›Spacing‹

Derrida's concepts of »*différance*« and »*effacement*« help to rethink this self-givenness of sense as the expression of this resistance to unity and presence. This expression takes the form of a trace, which, neither present nor absent, suspends meaning and full presence, leaving the narrative »open«. As such, to maintain a dialectic between presence and absence would be like maintaining »the chance of the aphorism«, as Derrida claims:

Maintaining [*maintenir*], despite the temptations, despite the possible reappropriation, the chance of the aphorism, is to keep within the interruption, without the interruption, the promise of giving place, if it is necessary/if it is missing [*s'il le faut*]. But it is never given.<sup>26</sup>

This »interruption« of presence defines an in-between space that is not the ground of a dialectical mediation between contradictory or »conflicting polarities«, but the generalizable »medium« or milieu in which differentiation takes place. In this type of reading, the in-between space would be something like the »spacing« of spaces, which are neither defined as interior or exterior, nor indeed as simple »in space«: Architecture would then consist in the configuring or differentiating of

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26 Derrida, »Fifty-Two Aphorisms for a Foreword«, in: Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke, Andrew Benjamin (eds.), *Deconstruction. Omnibus Volume*, London 1989, p. 69.

space into spaces which are always intermediary and function as porous limits, that is, as membranes or hymens. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida conceives this »spacing« as »the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the nonconscious [...]. This deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness, and therefore through the irreducible notion of the trace (*Spur*).«<sup>27</sup>

»This trace,« writes Derrida in »*Différance*«, »is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence [...]. *Effacement* must always be able to overtake the trace; otherwise, it would not be a trace but an indestructible and monumental substance.«<sup>28</sup> *Différance* is thus a play of ephemeral traces, such that presence is reduced to the instantaneous rising and decay of a trace, which as such appears as a punctual »pulsation« of presence. Thus, first, if traces erase full presence, they cannot be conceived of as »being« in terms of substantial beings or totalities; secondly, if traces are defined by their mutual interval in the series, i.e. by their mutual a-temporal difference, then presence as such is not only decentered, delayed, never complete, but rather reduced to an instant or a »flash« of presence. Finally, these reflections amount to emphasizing that the product of this play of traces breaks with both the idea of representation and the possibility of a synthesis of the heterogeneous, in short, with the idea of a whole that could only be maintained by resisting diversity, difference, separation and plurality.

## Libeskind and Eisenman: »In-Betweens« and their architectural expression

A work of architecture that leaves space and time in suspense, in an unfinished state, and whose sense is deferred and never to be fully grasped, could be regarded as an expression of this simulacrum of presence. Such an attempt was undertaken by the architects Daniel Libeskind and Peter

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27 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 68f.

28 Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison, Newton Garver, Evanston 1973, p. 156.

Eisenman who both draw on a dialectic of presence and absence, which avoids any synthesis and eludes representation.

Let us start by Libeskind and his Jewish Extension to the *Berlin Museum*, opened to the public in 2001. Open narratives and flexible spaces are precisely the main ideas at work. The point about these open narratives is that the parts of the building cannot be reconciled by any overall single thematic. Libeskind describes the generating moves in his design as breaking up rooms along trajectories, imposing displacements. Space is reduced to an ever-tightening passage occluded by fragmentary walls that allow for no opening up of space, while the visitor is forced to move angularly along or between the fragmentary planes, lines, and openings.<sup>29</sup> »Spaces« open to a passage that leads to nowhere and is traversed by a succession of cones of light and darkness that force the body to »feel« the play of absence. There is no comforting space but a violence in or about space that destabilize any perception of verticality, wholeness or directionality. Absence is also expressed by the »voided Void«: Libeskind coins this concept to suggest the presence of the absent victims.<sup>30</sup> We may ask whether the Void is the symbol of disappearance and forgetting, whether architecture tries to render the absent into a »phantasmagorical« presence, taking recourse on a »weakened« form of representation.

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29 See John Knesl, »Accidental Classicist: Freed in Washington, Libeskind in Berlin«, in: *Assemblage* 16, 1991, p. 98–101.

30 Cf. Daniel Libeskind, »An Architectural Design Interview«, in: *Architectural Design Profile No. 87: Deconstruction III*, 1990, p. 16f.

*Daniel Libeskind, Jewish Extension to the Berlin Museum.*



Source: Studio Libeskind.

In my view, it is the merit of Eisenman to have definitively ruined representation. This step might have resulted from his working on Derrida's texts *Force and Signification* and *Genesis and Structure* in the 1980's. The context here was their joint reading of the structuralist and phenomenological projects – more specifically, of Saussure and Husserl – as two, equally rigorous but finally incompatible reflections on the

character of language and meaning. In a letter to Eisenman written in 1989, Derrida criticizes Libeskind's and Eisenman's recurrence to the notions of void, absence and negativity, and views them as a form of »excess« that shows itself beyond all »ontological oppositions«. <sup>31</sup> However, Derrida acknowledged in 1987 that »that which overturns the opposition presence/absence, and thus an entire ontology, must nevertheless be advanced within the language that it transforms in this way,« in order to be both subjected to the law and able to play with it. <sup>32</sup> Here, Derrida seems to concede that in order for expression to be disrupted, we must recur to the established language. This means that architecture may give expression to an ›in-between‹ space between opposite terms only if it remains within the bounds of language. Eisenman seems to admit this impossibility of avoiding dialectics: in »Blue Line Text« of 1988 Eisenman introduces the notion of »blurring«, without, however, acknowledging its indebtedness to Derrida's notion of »effacement«. Eisenman writes that an architecture that embraces today's »instabilities and dislocations« would seek »to blur« traditional structures by their »blurring«, an idea that »admits the irrational to the rational.« <sup>33</sup>

He poses here the question of what the ›between‹ in architecture is. For Eisenman, »if architecture traditionally has been about ›topos‹ that is an idea of place, then to be between is to search for an ›atopos‹, the atopia within topos.« <sup>34</sup> Later, in 2001, he clarifies this notion of blurring:

Blurring is a conceptual activity. Blurring in architecture is not to suggest a condition where architecture is neither dependent on its former narratives nor devoid of meaning but resides between the

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31 Derrida, »Ein Brief an Peter Eisenman«, trans. Martina Kögl, Ullrich Schwarz, in: Ullrich Schwarz (ed.) *Peter Eisenman. Aura und Exzeß. Zur Überwindung der Metaphysik der Architektur*, Wien 1995, S. 173.

32 Derrida, »Why Peter Eisenman writes such good books«, in: Arie Graafland (ed.), *Peter Eisenman: Recent Projects*, Nijmegen 1989, p. 180.

33 Eisenman, »Blue Line Text«, in: Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke, Andrew Benjamin (eds.), *Deconstruction Omnibus Volume*, London 1988, p. 151.

34 Ibid.

two, where other form of meaning, and meaningful situation, can occur.<sup>35</sup>

An example of this strategy is the *Guardiola House* of 1988. Here, the displacement and overlapping of organizational structures produce the interlacing of spaces that do not allow for the distinction between figural and interstitial spaces, configuring thus in-between spaces, an in-between classical dialectical oppositions, such as figural/interstitial, open/close, presence/absence. Eisenman here reviews what architecture had traditionally understood as spaces ›pochés‹, an irregular space conformed by the in-between of representative and figural spaces, areas that were destined to spaces of service. In »Processes of the interstitial«, he recognizes that his notion of blurring and spacing differs from Derrida's idea:

Spacing as opposed to forming, begins to suggest a possible figure/figure, as opposed to figure/ground relationship, which in turn suggests a new possibility for the interstitial. The interstitial would be a void within a void, an overlapping within space of space, creating a density in space not given by the forming of a container with a profile.<sup>36</sup>

Here, the in-between as interval gains a positive connotation, since it is no longer conceived of as mere pictural ground and secondary space, but rather as figural space, even if it has no regular limits. As the project for the *Greater Columbus Convention Centre* (1989–93) shows, this strategy requires a high level of geometrical complexity, that, taken to its extreme, is flattened and transformed into an overlapping of geometrical lines that

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35 Eisenman, »Blurred Zones«, in: Cynthia Davidson (ed.), *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial*, New York 2001, p. 7.

36 Eisenman, »Processes of the Interstitial: Spacing and the Arbitrary Text«, in: Cynthia Davidson (ed.), *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial*, New York 2001, p. 100.

materialize as porous membranes between exterior and interior spaces and thus remind us of Derrida's notion of »hymen« in *Dissemination*.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, it is interesting to contrast Libeskind's strategy to Eisenman's as regards the memory of Holocaust.<sup>38</sup> In his *Memorial for the Jews killed in Europa*, built in Berlin between 2003 and 2005, Eisenman proposes to neutralize memory: He says: »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.«<sup>39</sup> This memorial consists of 2711 steles, which remind us of gravestones. No stele resembles the others, digital design methods enabled a plurality of different steles, almost unnoticeable inclined and standing on a wavering floor. The abstract conceived steles remit to no meaning, to no message, they have no inscriptions at all, they stand simply mute: With a »mute gesture«, this »machine à emouvoir« and »spinner of metaphors«<sup>40</sup> engenders a disruptive bodily experience. The body is overwhelmed by the massiveness of the stones, by the feeling of »disappearing« under their height. These forms can be conceived as built traces in Derrida's terms: It is only through the differential play between their configuration and their spatial distance to each other that they build up a text, a text which remains non-intelligible. Here, the »stèle-traces« not only suspend presence and origin, but they negate »place-ness« as well: There remains an unqualified, abstract space, a silent and cruel space. It is through the silence of the site that absent victims return to a presence, which can never be full. These steles offer neither an organic bodily referent nor a definite meaning: they show an openness that allows for a never-ending process of sense-formation.

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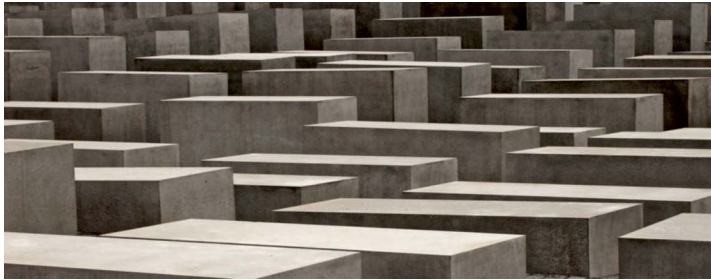
37 Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, London 1981, p. 209.

38 See Breuer, »Phenomenological Reflections on the Intertwining of Violence, Place and Memory. The Memorials of the Ungraspable«, in: *Studia Phenomenologica* XIX, 2019, p. 153–174.

39 Eisenman, »The City of Artificial Excavation«, in: *Architectural Design* 53 (7/8) 1983, p. 26.

40 Luis Fernández-Galiano, »Germania Remember: Berlin's Memorial or Eisenman's Danteum?«, in: Cynthia Davidson (ed.), *Blurred Zones: Investigations of the Interstitial*, New York 2001, p. 334.

Peter Eisenman, *Memorial for the Jews killed in Europa* (2003–2005).



Source: Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas.

The moving powers of these architectural works, which enhance dissonance over harmony and difference over identity, call forth a tension between our traditional bodily motor habits and our bodily lived experiences and force us into a self-reflection insofar as they compel us to question and suspend the institutionalized sense architecture has to convey. Thus, the disruption of our bodily motor habits leads, as I'd like to suggest, to a sublime bodily experience of space, and thus, to a *phenomenological feeling of the sublime*.<sup>41</sup> This newly conceived phenomenological sublime is an emotion aroused neither by the power of our reason transcending the inadequacy of imagination as it concerns nature, nor by the overwhelming powers of imagination as it concerns an artwork as in Kant, but by the excess of sensuousness engendering a negative pleasure, which echoes the bodily state of dispersion amid spatial sensuous forms that resist to be harnessed into concepts and lead to an endless process of sense formation.

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41 See Irene Breuer, »The affective intertwining of body and space. Towards a Phenomenological Sublime in Contemporary Architecture«, in: *B@abelonline vol. 6, New Phenomenological Horizons/Nuovi orizzonti fenomenologici*, 2020, p. 39–54.

## Concluding remarks

In short, in Libeskind's and Eisenman's works sense is always displaced, never present insofar as there is neither a spatial synthesis of heterogeneous elements, nor intelligibility or coherence, but the confrontation of structures and narratives. If narratives are »an attempt to clarify the inextricable,«<sup>42</sup> we may conclude that these constructed spaces avoid an explicit narrative by leaving it open, or rather, in suspension. Both architects offer a narrative that, despite avoiding any pre-established signification as far as conceptuality is concerned, imposes upon the body affections that belong to the sphere of sensuousness – a narrative of bodily experiences, of *pathos*, suffering and excess that can define the experiential realm of a phenomenological feeling of the sublime. Both architects draw on a dialectic of presence and absence, of representation and abstraction, a dialectic which avoids any synthesis. The in-between spaces they design are just traces or sparks of presence, in Derrida's sense, and paradigmatically illustrate through their geometry the fundamental hiatus between the logical idealities (or ideal platonic forms) and the indeterminacy of our phenomenological experience. They maintain the hiatus, that is, the ›in between‹ space opened by dialectical oppositions, a ›space‹ that is subjected to the pervasive work of the deferral of sense and to its inherent indeterminacy.

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