

FOG at ETH

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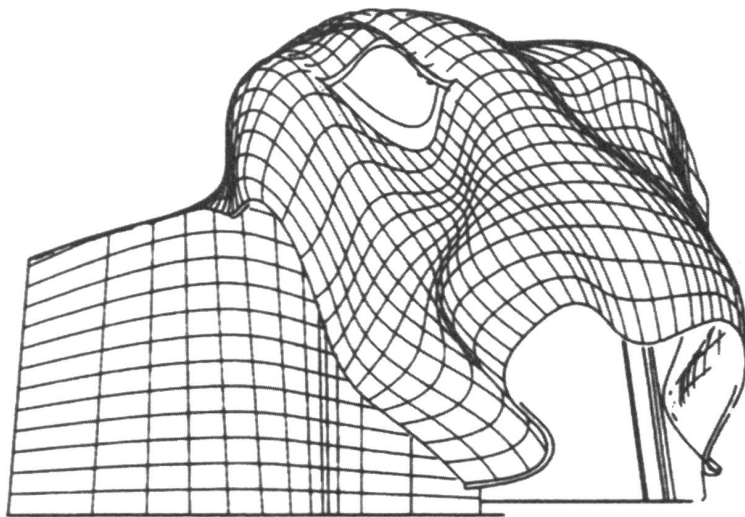
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FOG at ETH

Mark Lee

There have been more than a few pretenders to the throne of the 'Master Architect' since Peter Blake's book of the same title – James Stirling, Aldo Rossi, Alvaro Siza, not to mention Rem Koolhaas, who zealously constructs of his own oeuvre complète – But for whatever reason, nobody's been willing to take the risk to come across as an architect with a capital "A," a romantic-style genius, a master builder, someone possessed by his daimon or his muse, or even the magic piper on his trail. Nobody except Frank Gehry: a Canadian by birth, who, as legend goes, moved to Los Angeles as a young man, studied architecture at the University of Southern California, worked for Victor Gruen, flirted with academia at Harvard, and sagaciously chose to practice – first with Pereira & Luckman, then back to Gruen, then a stint with André Remondet in Paris, and finally set up his own firm in 1962.

Now, more than thirty years later – after completing more than 230 projects, building in 3 continents, winning 1 Pritzker Prize, being the subject of a major retrospective, and featuring in hundreds of books and journals; Frank Gehry had grounded idioms and materialized paradigms from project to project; going from valorizing povera materials to vaporizing historicist dispositions, from contextualizing the fish to colonizing the complex curve, all without abandoning a relentless desire to build. Often perceived as inseparable from the city he works in, Frank Gehry is now building in Seoul, Seattle, Bilbao, Berlin; everywhere around the world but Los Angeles. Generally regarded to be an outsider of the heavy-hitting American East-coast academic circle despite having taught extensively, Frank Gehry is now a guest professor at the ETH in Zürich. While giving every indication of being for real, all this points to a stage in Gehry's career that represents a departure of sorts in his personal trajectory.

Ever since his own startling Santa Monica House of 1978, Gehry had been occupying a central position in contemporary architecture – from Winton Guest House, to the Vitra Museum, to the Disney Concert Hall.



Abb. vorherige Seite: *Horse's Head, Lewis Residence*

Projects that stem from the pulse that initially transformed the forlorn weariness of the balloon frame and the chain link into something like a refined vivacity in his own house; the same pulse that makes it difficult to tell, of what could be expected from Frank Gehry next. But if one must locate a commonality that strings through this vibration, an immediate assertion would be the impact of the work itself – their ability to behold, their presence that shock on every subsequent encounter at they do on the first; and unlike the picturesque, they ask for active involvement. Unlike Peter Eisenman's work, they do not first beg to be understood, but plead to be experienced, to be infused with life by the vital presence of the subject. Another consistency emanates from Frank Gehry himself, while making the leap from critic's idol to the public's icon, his work has come to resemble no one more other than himself. For inseparable from Gehry's work is his enigmatic persona – a cross between the pragmatic professional and the Idealistic inventor committed to remain outside of mainstream academic discourse – a personal condition of congruity that appears deeply imprinted in his buildings, and further illuminates important aspects of his role as a teacher.

When asked by a critic if he would 'define art', Andy Warhol responded: 'Art? Isn't that a man's name?'. Not only did Warhol turn a pedagogical demand into a pun, by denying the categorical, Warhol replayed the non-chalant pose as critical stance. Like Warhol, Frank Gehry's blasé pose, undermines ballistic poise. In his usual subversion of the rhetorical necessity underlying academic exchange, the architect/teacher seems to be determined to discard the production of epistemological models – exhausted as generative templates for the making of architecture.

Perhaps the form of a conversational exchange, could perhaps best capture this Gehry phenomenon at this juncture of his career – when he is building in Europe and teaching at the ETH. Perhaps Europe's economic rebirth along with the high quality of construction are aspects that had been denied of Gehry in Los Angeles; or because Los Angeles is becoming the world, hence Gehry is building everywhere around the world. Perhaps

involving with students provide a critical distance from professional relationships, or taking the stage with the Jacques Herzog, Frank Stella, Jörg Schlaich, represents an expansion of territories within his interdisciplinary attitude towards architecture. In the following interview, Frank Gehry, arriving as a monument of calm interjected by lapses of jet-lag, discusses his views concerning architectural pedagogy, the questionable prerequisite of theory, his collaborations, and his work; inconspicuously serving notice that he is signed on for the whole ride through that difficult journey historically demanded by the practice and critical establishment alike, of every master architect.

A Conversation with Frank O. Gehry

Dirk Hebel
Mark Lee

ON ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION

You have had a long professional career as an architect, but alongside practice you have also been concurrently teaching at many institutions – from USC, UCLA to Rice, from Yale, Harvard, and now to ETH. Most people know a lot about Frank Gehry the architect, but not as much about Frank Gehry the teacher. What are your thoughts about architecture education and the various tendencies in different architectural programs?

I think it points to the individual, what I said before is that training has to take into account that everybody is different. Different levels of intelligence, different levels of experience, economic background, family. Everybody cannot be the same architect. The tendencies in the schools are to try and make the Richard Meier, the Michael Graves, the Peter Eisenman. And everybody cannot be that, everybody has to find his own way. And I think teaching has to deal with this issue. When I approached this class at ETH, we have twenty-four people of very different character; and you see the breaking points, of who they are, and you can dismiss twenty-four people if you only think in terms of Meier, Graves and Eisenman, then twenty-four people are out. And when you treat them like that in the attitude as a professor, they are lost. They are done, they get into