

Frank Gehry ■







# Frank Gehry



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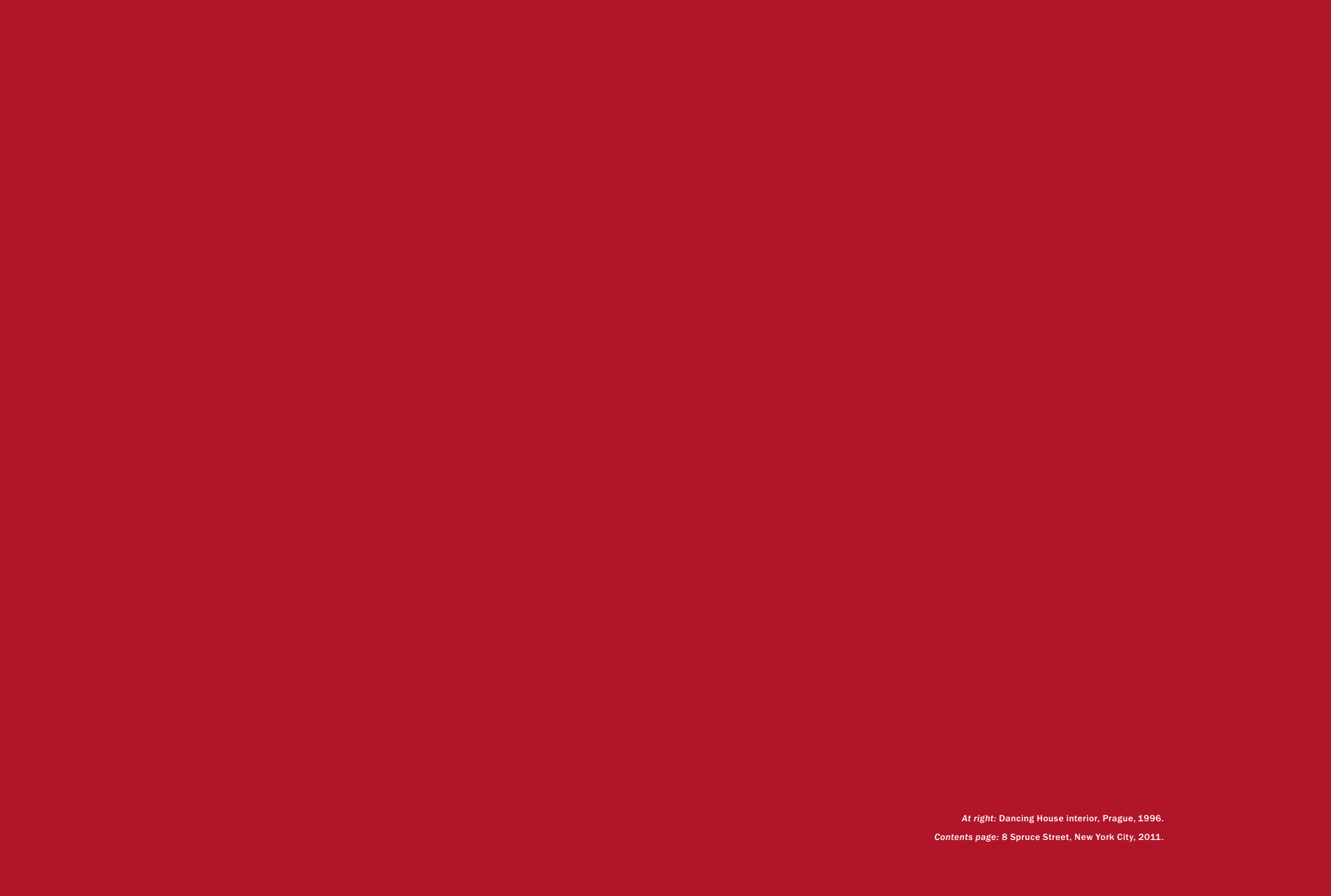
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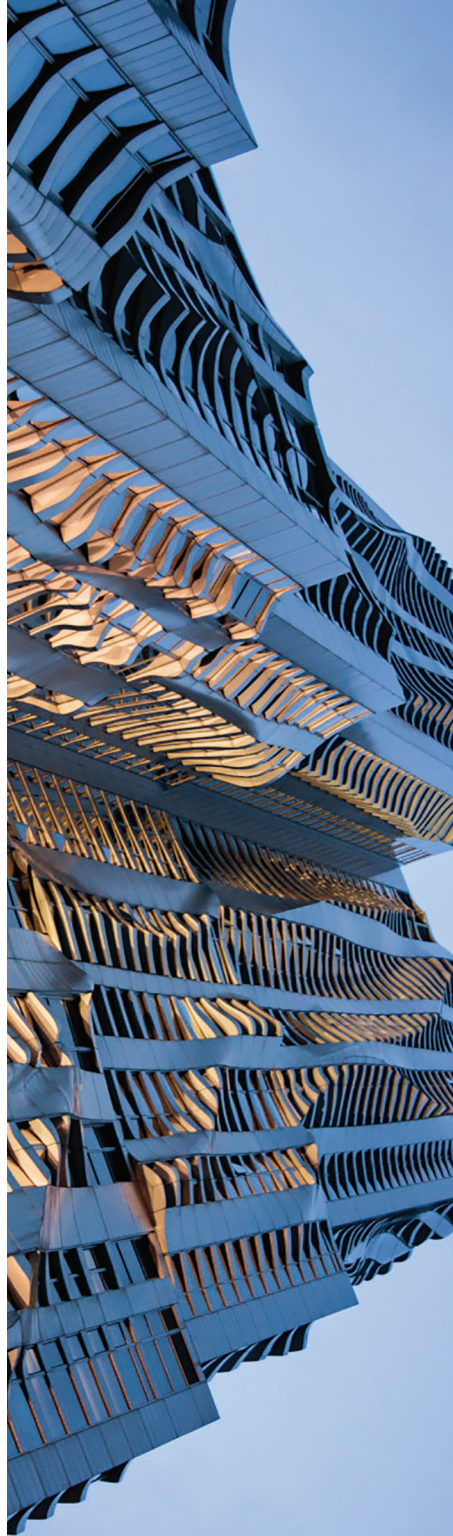


At right: Dancing House interior, Prague, 1996.  
Contents page: 8 Spruce Street, New York City, 2011.





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At right: photo courtesy of Liberatum.org.  
Next page: Guggenheim Museum Bilbao detail.

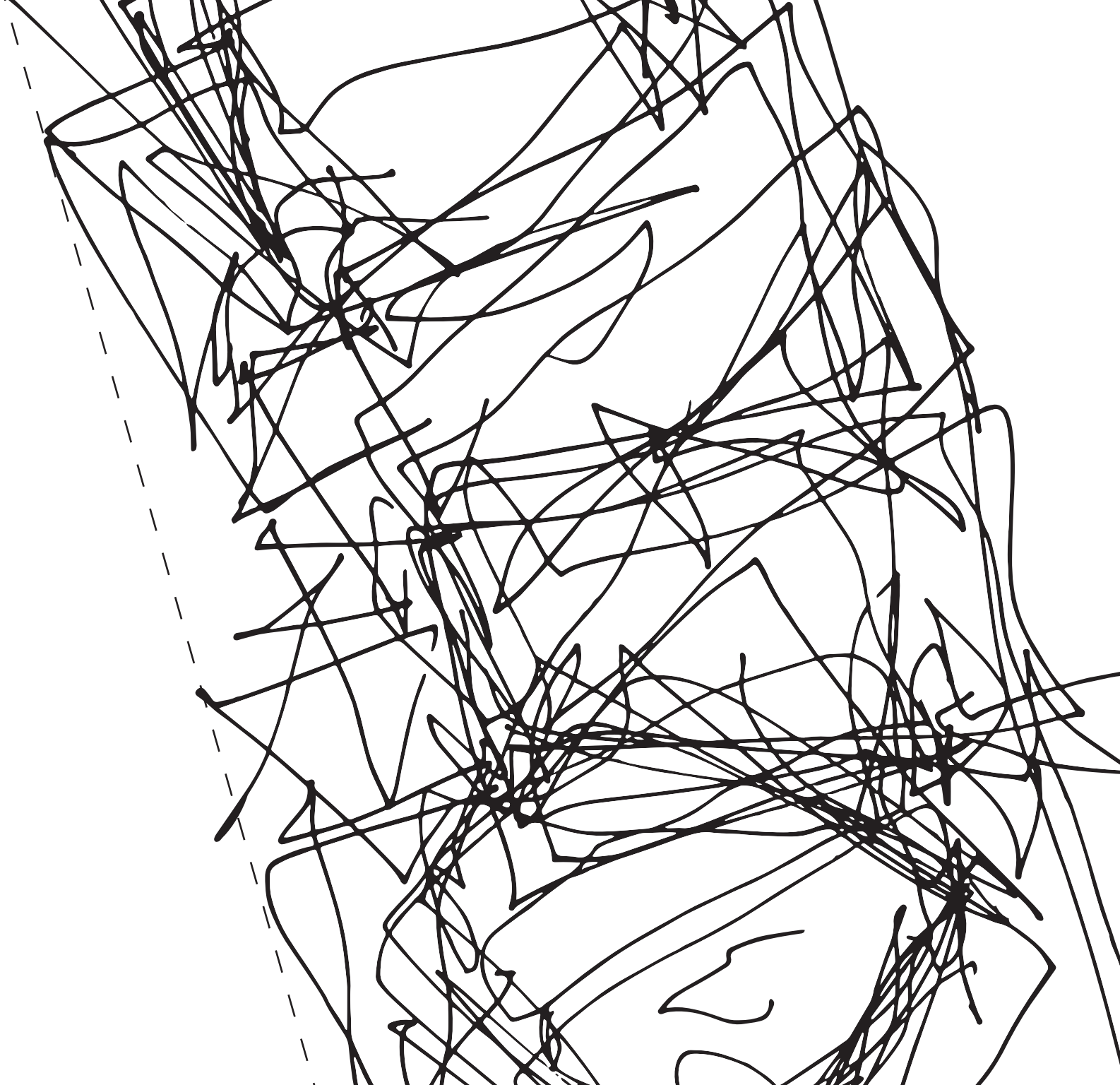




# Frédéric

Frédéric  
Migayrou

*t h e   o r g a n o n   o f*





# “Now MY METHOD”

Though hard to practice, is easy to explain; and it is this. I propose to establish progressive stages of certainty. The evidence of the sense, helped and guarded by a certain process of correction, I retain. But the mental operation which follows the act of sense I for the most part reject; and instead of it I open and lay out a new and certain path for the mind to proceed in, starting directly from the simple sensuous perception. The necessity of this was felt, no doubt, by those who attributed so much importance to logic, showing thereby that they were in search of helps for the understanding, and had no confidence in the native and spontaneous process of the mind. But this remedy comes too late to do any good, when the mind is already, through the daily intercourse and conversation of life, occupied with unsound doctrines and beset on all sides by vain imaginations.

*Francis Bacon*

*preface to The New Organon, or True Directions  
Concerning the Interpretation of Nature, 1620.*

Walt Disney Concert Hall interior (this page)  
and exterior (opposite).





Photo: Pej Behdarvand.

t r a n s l a t e d   b y   Dafydd Roberts

**For Francis Bacon,** the New Organon that he opposed to the dogmatic logic of the Scholastics called for a return to the observation of natural phenomena and the development of tools that allowed the organization of experience. The method was intended to produce, through a process of slow maturation, logical generalizations whose truth would have been demonstrated in the very process of their productions. This gradual generalization from individual cases, this induction, to use the philosophical term, might be said to have a parallel in Frank Gehry's method of work. For Gehry has always sought to escape the dogmatisms that have tempted his contemporaries—the

dogmatism of modernism, of the Case Studies that were omnipresent in 1960s California, of the postmodernism that in the end returned to the same normativity, applying similarly abstract rules to architectural composition. While, in a series of major projects, his work has attained a form of universality—his works being the very image of what is most contemporary in architecture—there have been few efforts to explicate an aesthetic and a language that have been elaborated over a period of 50 years, unaligned with any tendency or movement.

Consideration of the architect's biography might offer certain clues, from his departure from Poland, to the years in Canada, to his settling in Los Angeles. Events in his personal life, too, can be invoked as an explanation, even to the point of seeing the famous Gehry Residence (1977–78, 1991–94) as an autobiographical manifesto, the generative matrix that imposes a distinctive stamp on not only the architecture, but the architect himself, Gehry's being both hero and author of this architectonic narrative. "In beginning with a commonly accepted type and ending up with a unique dwelling," says Kurt W. Forster, "the architect revisits the construction of identity in a manner no less powerful than when a pack of social clichés is torn to pieces."<sup>1</sup> Resolution of Freudian tensions between the house as a place of withdrawal, of an entirely Hegelian generative interiority, and the ostentatious display of paternal protection in the extravagance

<sup>1</sup> Kurt W. Forster, "Architectural Choreography," in Francesco Dal Co and Kurt W. Forster, *Frank O. Gehry: The Complete Works* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), 16.



of the envelope: it is in the space in between these that the inversions and reversals that Gehry brings about occur, the plays on open and closed, public and private, the visible and the hidden, the form and the formless, the object and the assemblage, this way of making the building a focal point on which there converge two conceptions of history, a locus of conflict between the old house, memory and history and the new, an avant-gardism that comes to destroy.

The Gehry Residence remains the point of convergence of the two dimensions that have animated the architects research: the practical efficiency characteristic of professional practice on the one hand and a desire for experimentation that tests the limits of the discipline on the other. With a degree of justification, some would rightly seek to understand the coherence of the architects work as a whole on the basis of this house, which constitutes a program in miniature. Yet Gehry's career had begun twenty years earlier with the Steeves Residence (1958–59) and the establishment of his own office in 1962, The man who had collaborated with landscape designer Hideo Sasaki, with architects John Portman, Richard Aeck, and Andrew Steiner, with Pereira & Luckman on Los Angeles Airport, and also with Victor Gruen, inventor of the shopping mall and pioneer of urban design—first for a year in 1953, and then as project manager from 1958 to 1960—who had worked in Paris for André Remondet in 1961, and also with urban planner Robert Auzelle, already possessed a substantial body of skills, honed in the development and realization of some 80 projects, many involving urban design.

With such programs behind him as the 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> of residential accommodation at the Kenmore Apartments (1963–64), a development of 84 detached houses at Bixby Green (1968–69), a 15,000-m<sup>2</sup> office building for the Rouse Company Headquarters (1969–74), the renovation of the Hollywood Bowl (1970–82), a 60,000-m<sup>2</sup> mall at Santa Monica Place (1972–80), the Atrium of the Rudge and Guenzel Building (1974–76). and the 15-story residential building Harper House (1976), the architect Gehry was already, at the turn of the 1980s, an experienced builder and urban designer who had mastered every aspect of the profession. And the most fascinating aspect of his work has to be the patient elaboration of a process of unlearning that no doubt began with Danziger Studio/Residence (1964) and which would gradually come to overturn the languages and the practices, essentially the entire process of the architectural and urban design. In architecture, each of the elements employed (from plane space to geometry, from form to material, from structure to the presuppositions of harmony or composition) would be subjected to radical experiment. In this. Gehry was reconnecting with the immanence of cognition, the ingenuity (in the sense of the freedom conferred by ingenuus) proper to the artists he mixed with, finding it possible to recompose an expression, to transfigure norms and codes. One can detect in the corpus of his work the different phases of a critical redeployment of the languages of architecture that lays the basis for a new practice, defining the fundamentals that will ground an original methodology and aesthetic.

## The Anatomy

Whatever approach is adopted, interpretations of Gehry's work always return to questions of origin. From family history to tales of apprenticeship, from the fascination with everyday materials to a craft-like practice of architectural modeling, consideration of the development of the work, of the emergence of new logics of creation, ends up in the investigation of biographical, historical, and contextual sources, seemingly taking the form of an ontological quest. Gehry's discovery of architecture and his encounter with Raphael Soriano on the site where the latter was building



Team Disney Building Interior, Anaheim, 1996.

a house for Glen Lukens—Gehry’s teacher of ceramics at the University of Southern California (USC)—certainly mark a turning point. Given his students evident fascination, Lukens offered to support an application for admission to the School of Architecture. “[Soriano] was directing construction with great authority. I was terribly moved by this image. I found myself intrigued with the work of Soriano and the idea of architecture. I think it was Glen’s hunch that would happen,”<sup>2</sup> it would, however, be excessive, on the basis of this encounter alone, to locate Gehry’s starting point somewhere in the wake of the transition from the International Style to what would emerge, through the Case Study Houses, as California Modern, Even if the relations of inside and outside, of open and closed, and the associated mobility of separations would all retain

their importance, Gehry would recognize himself neither in the declared Modernism of Richard Neutra nor in the formalism of the ultralight metal frames of Ralph Rapson, Pierre Koenig, or Craig Ellwood, too marked by functionalism and standardization. Esther McCoy, author of the programmatic *Case Study Houses, 1945–1962*, stressed that the Case Study Houses, still under the influence of 1930s Modernism, “were an idealized mirror of an age in which an emerging pragmatism veiled Rooseveltian idealism.... By 1962 it had become clear that the battle for housing had been won by the developers.”<sup>3</sup> At the usc School of Architecture, Gehry would enlarge his knowledge of the Californian architectural scene. It was then that he met Julius Shulman and came across Garrett Eckbo’s landscape work, as well as that of Gregory

Ain, whose MarVista Housing (1947–48) would influence the design of Bixby Green (1968–69). But the greatest influence on him must certainly have been Harwell Hamilton Harris, whose approach to materials and to a building’s relationship to its site was informed by Arts & Crafts, by the work of Greene & Greene, and above all by that of Frank Lloyd Wright, who had championed an open plan and continuity in the articulation of spaces, Looking at the Steeves Residence and its Wright-inspired cruciform plan, one thinks of Harris’ Wylie House (1948) with its projecting roof reaching out into the surrounding environment. The influence of Frank Lloyd Wright should be not underestimated, especially as regards layout and the furniture—the “Wrightian fantasies”<sup>4</sup>—that Gehry conceived for the army at Fort Benning (1955). Alongside something of Bernard Maybeck, whose First Church of Christ Scientist (1912) seems to have influenced the outline of the Kay Jewelers Stores (1963–65), Wright’s mark can be seen in the very logic of Gehry’s designs, in the organic distribution of spaces that imposes discontinuities in the roofing, whether flat (Hauser-Benson Health Resort, 1964) or in the form of simple slopes enlivened by breaks and changes of level (Kline Residence, 1964; Reception Center, Columbia, 1965). The influence of Wright, who had introduced a taste for things Japanese to Californian and was himself a collector and dealer in Japanese prints,<sup>5</sup> can be seen again in Gehry’s

design for the exhibition *Art Treasures from Japan* (1965) at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), done in collaboration with Greg Walsh, a great connoisseur of Japanese art and the architects first partner According to Mildred Friedman, “the character of the gallery was quite literally Japanized, but it was Japan with overtones of Wright that flowed naturally from Gehry’s architecture of that time. Gehry’s early work had been strongly influenced by Wright and though the decorative aspects of Wright’s architecture have been eliminated from Gehry’s built work, he has retained the asymmetrical plan and abiding concern with materials that are hallmarks of the Wrightian style.”<sup>6</sup> With Modernism in crisis, the question of the specificity of Californian architecture became urgent. A return to the sources of a Californian identity would animate architects such as Portman, paradoxical practitioner of corporate architecture, with whom Gehry collaborated. Portman invoked not only Wright, but also Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose Nature (1836) urged the restoration of the link between mankind and a transcendental nature, as well as Bruce Goff, who championed the heritage of Louis H. Sullivan and Wright. Faced with Sullivan’s famous precept that “form ever follows function,” Wright rejected any functionalist interpretation: “Louis Sullivan was a complete stranger to what one has sought to reduce him to as a precursor of functionalism, which could only be a distortion, either then or

<sup>2</sup> Frank Gehry, cited in Wolfgang Wagerer, *Replaid Soriano* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Esther McCoy, *Case Study Houses, 1945–1962* (Santa Monica, CA: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1977), 4–5, preface to the 2nd edition.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Hines, “Heavy Metal: The Education of F.O.C.,” in Rosemarie Haag Bieler, et al., *The Architecture of Frank Gehry*, (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 1986), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Julia Meach, *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Art of Japan: The Architect’s Other Passion* (New York: Japan Society and Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Mildred Friedman, “Fast Food,” in Bieler, et al. (see note 4), 89–90.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, “Form and Function,” *The Saturday Review* (December 14, 1935); reprinted in Frank Lloyd Wright, *Collected Writings*, Volume 3, 1931–1939 (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 187.

now.”<sup>7</sup> For Wright, form and function were one, just as they were in animals or in the plants that Sullivan had favored in his quest for motifs. “Use both the word organic and the word Nature in a deeper sense—essence instead of fact: say form and function are one. Form and idea then do become inseparable.... Organic architecture does prove the unity of structure and the unity of the nature of aesthetics with principle.”<sup>8</sup> Against any suggestion of the representation of natural forms, it was a question of discovering the essence, the intrinsic principles of a morphogenetics, of affirming the inner unity of any architectural project, and developing a distinctive mode of architectural composition or “writing” (*écriture*). One may thus formulate the principles of the organic architecture that first emerged in 1908 to be formalized only in 1939 with the

publication of Wright’s *An Organic Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy*. Architecture must respect the essential characteristics of its materials, which have a value in themselves, in their nature, texture, and color, and which have to be related to a specific context, to an identifiable environment. The building is the expression of these materials, which determine the possibilities of form and the logic of design. In this process, ornament always emerges from the use of the material; it is never a superadded motif. Every project conceived in the interrelation of context and construction is specific to the site in which it is implanted. The architecture draws its qualities from the site, and, vice versa, the site is modulated by the architecture. For Wright, “No one noticed that we had a particularly beautiful site until the house was built.... When organic

architecture is properly carried out no landscape is ever outraged by it but is always developed by it.”<sup>9</sup> While taking on board the Wrightian aesthetic example, Gehry, already involved in large-scale urban development during his time with Gruen, sought to take into account the materiality of the context, especially urgent in Los Angeles, where the urban sprawl of the “carpet city” seemed to unroll without end. For Gehry, “The chaos of our cities, the randomness of our lives, the unpredictability of where you’re going to be in ten years from now—all of those things are weighing on us, and yet there is a certain glimmer of control. If you act a certain way, and talk a certain way, you’re going to draw certain forces to you.”<sup>10</sup> There thus emerges the temptation to naturalize the city and all its artifice, a reexamination that finds its model in territorial conquest, a naturalism that seeks to find new uses, new employments of the urban: “The architecture of a second-order naturalism cannot content itself with the constitution of new objects; it must at the same time take account of its anthropological significance,”<sup>11</sup> The Danziger Studio represents in this respect a first break, its mute facade creating a disruption in relation to the commercial activity on Melrose Boulevard. The closedness of the two cubes of this minimalist object, the play on symmetry and the shifts of scale, create a disharmony, a silent response to the urban disorder that protects the private space. For the first time, Gehry left the structure and ventilation clearly visible, while the

exterior was covered in an unpainted rough gray render. The architectural object has value in itself: it is an independent entity that is nonetheless connected to the environment in which it is located by the Wrightian logic of an architecture born of the material tensions of the context: “The Danziger Studio was a way of creating a controlled, marginal space amid the disorder of LA’s urban environment. When I did it, everyone was surprised, but I realized afterward that neglecting the possibility of interfacing with the city was restrictive”?<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *Genius and the Machine* (New York: Horizon Press, 1949), 99. Wright, who had been given a collection of drawings by Louis Sullivan, decided to pay tribute to him by writing this critical biography.

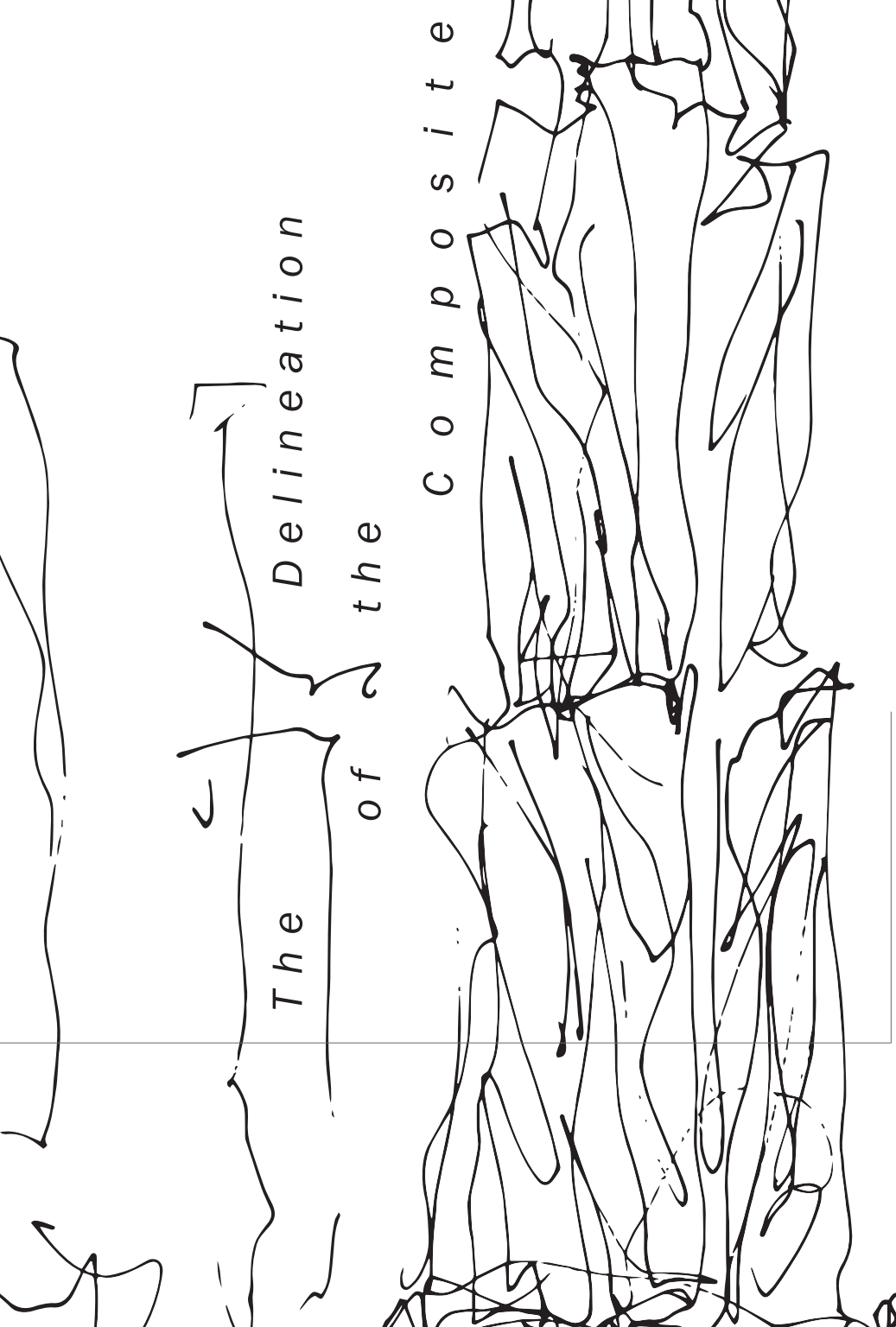
<sup>9</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Organic Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy* (London: Lund Humphries, 1939), reprinted in Wright, *Collected Writings*, (see note 7), 330.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Gehry, interviewed in Ross Miller and Angela Ledgerwood, “New Again: Frank Gehry,” *Interior Magazine*, January 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Alejandro Zaera-Polo, “Frank O. Gehry: Still Life,” in *Frank Gehry, 1987-2003*, ed. Fernando Márquez Cecilia and Richard C. Levene, (Madrid: El Croquis, 2006), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Gehry, in Alejandro Zaera-Polo, “Conversation with Frank Gehry,” in Márquez Cecilia and Levene (see note 11), 10.





The implantation of an architectural object in a singular context became the guiding thread of an investigation that can be illustrated through Gehry's work with the Rouse Company, notably for the new town of Columbia, Maryland, where the Merriweather-Post Pavilion (1966–67) and then the Public Safety Building (1967–68) were built. To combat the oppressive scale of the big city, developer James Rouse— inventor of the “business park” and Victor Gruen’s client for a number of shopping malls—had recruited a team of urban planners, sociologists, and teachers to advise on the framework for his “planned communities,” the new towns that were intended as “a comprehensive response to the aspirations of a free society.”<sup>13</sup> In seeking integration with the site, Gehry

<sup>13</sup> “Merriweather Post Pavilion, Columbia, Maryland,” in Dal Co and Foster, *Frank O. Gehry* (see note 1), 84.



Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, 1993.

was attentive to the geometry of the roofs: a suspended trapezoidal structure for the Merriweather-Post Pavilion (and later for the Concord Performing Arts Center, 1973–76), a roof standing clear of the mass for the Public Safety Building. Transforming the way the buildings are seen in relation to the site, this illusionism became more marked in the O’Neill Hay Barn (1968), “the first built work in which Gehry explored a strong non-orthogonal geometry and played with the illusionistic and expressive possibilities of distorted perspectives.”<sup>14</sup> To further promote integration into the site, Gehry lightened the whole construction, the corrugated steel panels, creating a continuity, like an envelope, between walls and roof, a principle carried further in the Davis Studio/Residence (1968–72). Designing an exhibition at the LACMA in 1968 for Billy Al Bengston, a Pop artist who worked with recycled materials and screen-printed logos on sheet metal, Gehry covered the walls with corrugated steel panel, a material he would later use in many of his projects. Gehry met and became friends with the artists of the Ferus Gallery, among them Larry Bell, Ed Ruscha, Ken Price, Robert Irwin, Ed Moses, and Bengston. At the time, a new art scene was emerging in LA, influenced first by the hybrid materiality of Rauschenberg’s Combine Paintings and the complex textures of Jasper Johns’ Flags and Maps, and then by the emerging Pop Art movement. This was such a dynamic artistic community that the LACMA organized a vast survey show, “a scene of utter, madcap camaraderie between the Museum and the artistic community,”<sup>15</sup> featuring, among others, Ruscha, Berlant, Craig

<sup>14</sup> S. J. Diamond, “Should We Set Fire to the Art Museum?” Los Angeles Magazine, March 1968.

<sup>15</sup> “O’Neill Hay Barn,” in Dal Co and Foster, *Frank O. Gehry* (see note 1), 91.

Kauffman, Baldessari, John Altoon, and Oldenburg, all artists who would leave their mark on Gehry’s work. This relationship to art, and to these artists in particular, would lead him to consider in depth the ontological problems of the status of the architectural object and of its physical identity within the context. His encounter with Ron Davis prompted a fruitful dialogue that ended in the literal “pictorialization” of architectural volume. An open box, perspective is disaggregated to be reconfigured in a form that is endlessly recomposed from different points of view onto the site. While Davis in his resin-based paintings explored questions of geometrical illusion, Gehry conferred on them a full reality: “The shift from orthogonal to perspectival came from Ron Davis because he was doing paintings that were about perspectival constructions. I was fascinated by the fact that he could draw but he could not make them; he could not turn them into three-dimensional objects.”<sup>16</sup>

Gehry then made drawing itself a design tool, constantly reexamining the tension between graphic composition and the translation of spatial analytics into built volume. Here, again, one sees an organic conception of space that calls to mind Rudolf M. Schindler, a disciple of Wright’s: “The house of the future is a symphony of space forms—each room a necessary and unavoidable part of the whole.”<sup>17</sup> The space is constituted of abstract planes that organize separations, openings, and even furniture into a whole, an open ensemble comparable to the De Stijl compositions. In his article “Care of

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf M. Schindler, “Care of the Body: Shelter or Playground,” *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, May 2, 1926.

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf M. Schindler, “Furniture and the Modern House,” *Architect and Engineer* (December 1933): 22.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Gehry, cited in Zaera-Polo, “Frank O. Gehry: Still Life” (see note 1), p. 19.

the Body: Shelter or Playground,”<sup>18</sup> Schindler describes a dynamic continuity of space in which the play of interrelations reinforces the presence of the body. Stefanos Polyzoides: “Space architecture considered the void as being a positive, moldable medium, the raw material for place-making inside and outside buildings. Schindler belonged to a minoritarian modern position that resisted the conception of space as an abstract, featureless medium.... It was the volumetric definition of interiors that generated the images, the plasticity and the material qualities of ... his buildings?”<sup>19</sup> The many sketches of exploded cubes and the exploration of the interlacing of spatial dimensions that then inspired Gehry’s work recall Theo Van Doesburg’s tesseracts, and more distantly the explorations of hyperspace

<sup>19</sup> Stefanos Polyzoides, “Space Architecture Inside Out,” in R. M. Schindler, *Composition and Construction*, ed. Lionel March and Judith Sheene (London: Academy Editions/Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1993), 198.

and of the fourth dimension through which Claude Bragdon hoped to be able to “trace individualities on the plan.” Bragdon, another disciple of Louis Sullivan’s, “translated the theory of *n*-dimensional space into a set of techniques for using mathematics, “the universal solvent of all forms,” to generate beautiful patterns fully abstracted from nature’s visible forms.”<sup>20</sup> Gehry’s drawings do not construct forms, they distribute the elements of space. The stroke of the pen becomes an instrument of separation, distinction. The line is a continuous delimitation of the dimensions of the space; it is a delineation—etymologically a *delineatio*, a drawing or sketch—a fundamental aspect of Gehry’s work that has prompted in many people a mystique of the sketch, the sketch that reveals the almost ontological role

<sup>20</sup> Horst Bredekamp, “Frank Gehry and the Art of Drawing,” in *Gehry Drawings*, ed. Mark Kappot and Robert Viotete (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2004), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Massey, *Crystal and Abstraction: Claude Bragdon, Ornament and Modern Architecture* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 143.



that continuous line plays for the architect.<sup>21</sup> Gehry then raises these lines into volumes that divide the space in accordance with vectors of tension that, as can be seen in the case of *Mid-Atlantic Toyota* (1976–78), undo the whole system of separations and openings in favor of another continuity. The forms of the city (façades, roofs, etc.) reappear as shadows cast on the interior of the building, producing in effect the reverse of the doubled facade of Santa Monica Place, where the interior seems to extend into the exterior, into the void. The drawing becomes an anaglyph, the line splitting to create parallaxes, unsettling the elements of the architectural composition, fracturing the volume, the window openings traversing the walls as improbable bow windows (Gemini G.E.L., 1976–79), tipping the roofs over into violent projections (Cabrillo Marine Museum, 1977–79),

doubling the volumes and the internal walls (Wagner Residence, 1978; Gunther Residence, 1978). Subordinated to the unity of the line, the motif recovers its juridical status as motive, as justification for these negative compositions. The architecture fragments, without ever becoming collage or assemblage. In this rejection of all postmodern temptations, the architecture becomes composite without ever combining heterogeneous elements: there is a unity in complexity. Esther da Costa Meyer: “The contours dissolve in a haze of overlapping lines that keep the forms slightly out of focus, slipping from the spectators’ grasp. In his wish to avoid massive structures that dwarf their surroundings, the architect often resorts to an archipelago of smaller buildings around an equivocal center that resists stasis.”<sup>22</sup>

22  
Esther da Costa Meyer, *Frank Gehry: On Line*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 55.



Above: Frank Gehry in his Marina del Rey studio.  
Next spread: Dancing House exterior.

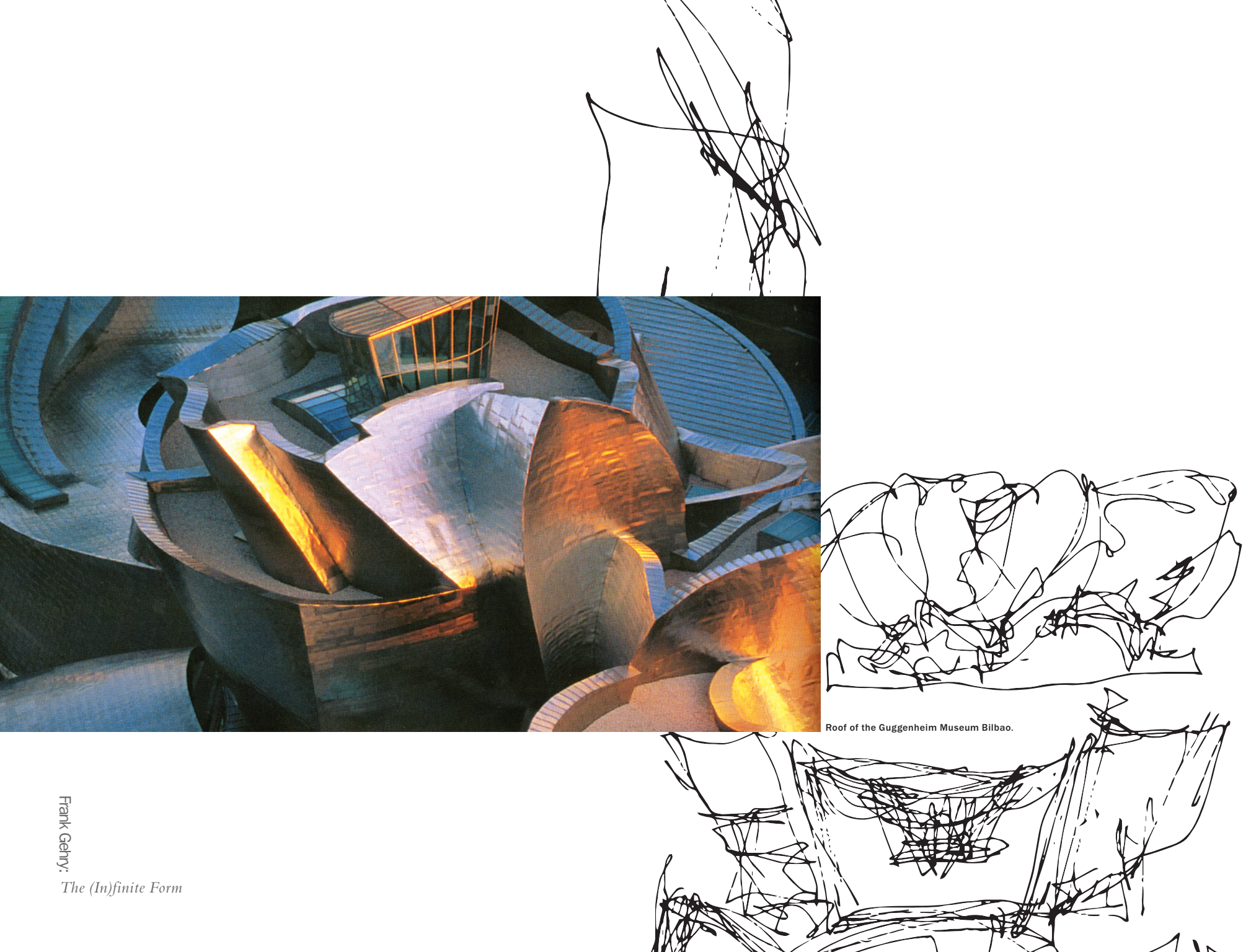




*c* the architecture *h* *a* *o* *s*  
*o f*

*Jason  
Miller*





Roof of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

# The buildings of Frank Gehry,

perhaps more than those of any other architect, effectively convey the tumult of life, but they embody as well life's energy, wonder, and abundant joy. His signature architecture employs sensuous curves, myriad volumes, and surprising materials and forms, challenging the viewer to figure out exactly how the building "works." But Gehry practices a regulated chaos, creating a realm in which buildings do unexpected things like swoop and sail but still function sensibly as habitable spaces.

The buildings also lead the viewer to wonder how the architect works. From what sort of mind do such designs spring, and how are these peculiar ideas rendered into structurally sound buildings? A look into the past, at some of Frank Gehry's formative experiences, and a glimpse of architecture's future, at the art and science of computer modeling, provide many of the answers.

Born Frank Owen Goldberg on February 28, 1929, in Toronto, Ontario, Gehry enjoyed a fairly typical middle-class childhood. He was an average student, with average interests. He played sports. He worked at his grandparents' hardware store. Like most children, he adored his grandmother, and thrived on the attention she gave him. The two would spend hours on the floor building "cities" out of scrap wood she collected from a neighboring shop. Frank also made playthings of common bushel baskets, bending and weaving the flat strips of wood into interesting shapes.

Every Thursday, Frank and his grandmother visited the market to buy a live carp for the family's Sabbath supper. They brought the fish home and placed it in the bathtub until it was time to make the gefilte fish. Young Frank watched the creature cruise the edges of the tub, a



beautiful bit of enchantment finning slowly through the water. The next day the fish would be gone, but it remained suspended in Gehry’s mind, an enduring symbol of nature’s flawless blend of form and function.<sup>1</sup>

Irwin Goldberg, Frank’s father, had grown up in New York City, and retained a veneer of toughness, but Frank’s mother, Thelma, took him and his sister on outings to museums and concerts, instilling in her children a lifelong love of art. When Gehry was about twelve, his father moved the family to a small mining town in Ontario, where Irwin opened a slot machine business. A shy kid, Frank continued to do well in school but, as the only Jewish boy in the small town, he also encountered anti-Semitism for the first time, and was constantly harassed by older, bigger boys. After the Canadian government banned slot machines, Irwin’s business was ruined and the family went back to Toronto. Multiple business failures there took their toll on Irwin, and in 1947 Frank and his mother sold the family’s possessions and organized a move to Los Angeles.

Far from living the American dream, the Goldbergs barely managed to scrape by in California. To support himself, Gehry went to work installing breakfast nooks, but enrolled in art classes at the University of Southern California to relieve the boredom of his job and to prepare himself for a better future. The family’s losses and the uncertain new landscape left Geh-

ry feeling underconfident and alienated, and he sought out LA’s vibrant art scene as a means of reconnecting with things he cared about.<sup>2</sup> While still in school at USC, Gehry found his true passion: he visited an architectural site with a teacher and friend, and became entranced with the process, promptly switching his major to architecture.

During that time, he also met a young woman, Anita, who became his wife. Anita worked as a secretary so that Gehry could finish school, and in 1954 he graduated with honors. It was Anita who suggested that Frank change his name from Goldberg to Gehry, in response to the anti-Semitism he experienced both during his childhood in Canada and in school in the States. After Gehry served briefly in the army, the couple moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Gehry planned to study urban development at Harvard. He hoped to effect real social change with innovative designs for affordable housing, but was soon frustrated by the university’s staid approach to urban planning. Eventually, he had a falling out with one of his professors and returned to Los Angeles in 1957, disillusioned, to search for an approach to architecture more compatible with his politics. But Gehry’s time at Harvard did yield one important outcome: he was introduced to the breadth of architectural history, including the buildings of Le Corbusier,<sup>3</sup> whose reliance on the organic forms found in his own cubist paintings has been cited by Gehry as a powerful influence on his own architecture.



Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health Interior, Las Vegas, 2010.

Over the next several years, Gehry worked for a number of different architectural firms, designing malls and a few residences, but was ultimately unsatisfied. He moved his family, which by this time included two small daughters, to Paris, where he worked for the firm of the renowned French architect André Remondet, and studied great works of architecture in his spare time.

When he returned to the States in 1962, he was ready to open his own firm, at first working with another architect but eventually operating simply as Frank O. Gehry and Associates. The small Santa Monica firm began soliciting commissions, with Gehry’s first client

offering him two thousand dollars to add a facade and a garden to a warehouse building.<sup>4</sup> Clients slowly came, drawn to Gehry by word of mouth, and over the next decades he built a clientele that appreciated his interesting yet budget-conscious designs.

Stimulated by his pop artist friends and driven by his own restlessness, Gehry strove to include creative touches in his architecture, but often found himself constrained by the requirements of his commercial clients as well as by tight budgets. In some of his projects, Gehry began reinterpreting conventional designs with materials generally covered over or discarded, such as concrete block and plywood.

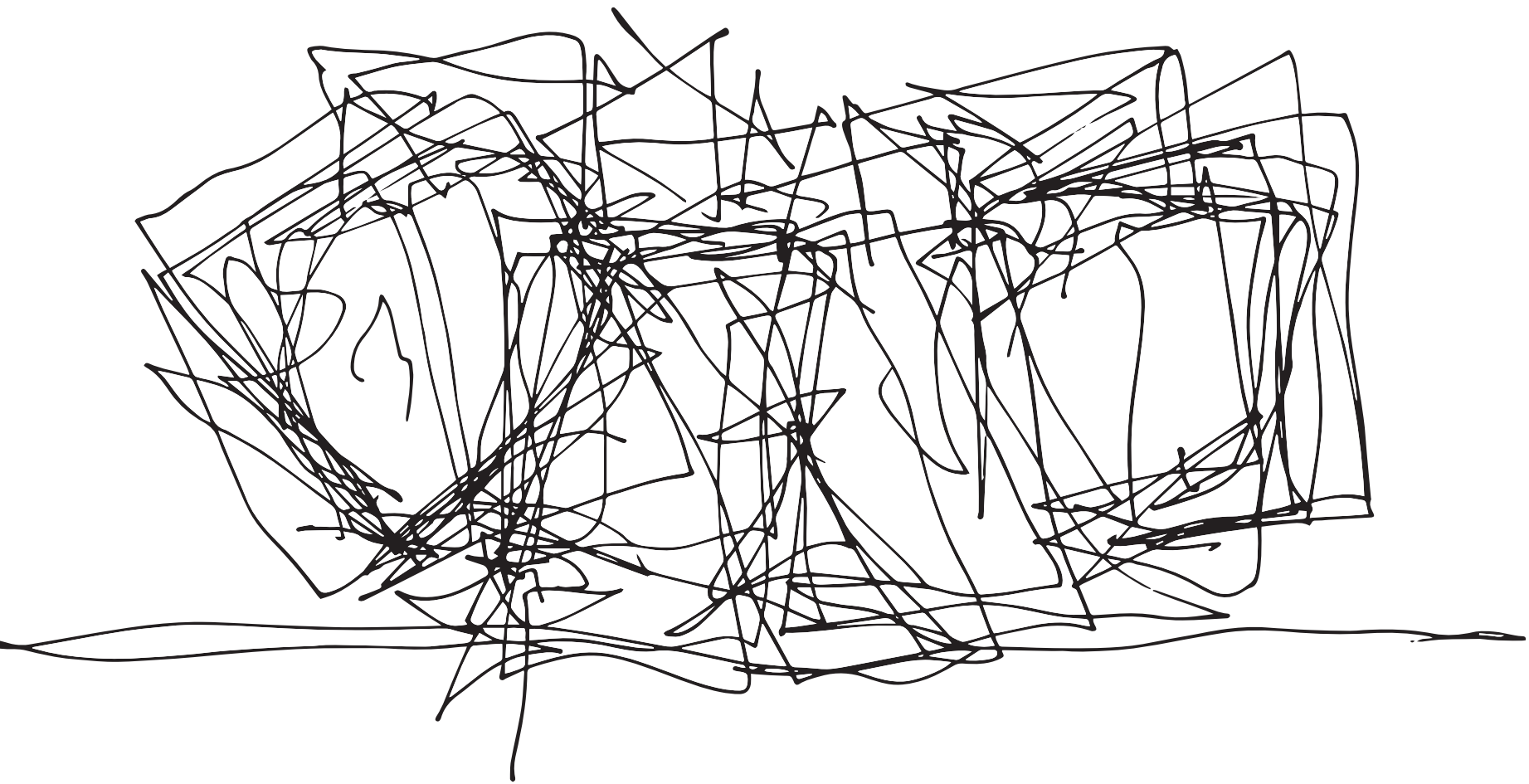
<sup>1</sup> Frank Gehry, interviewed in Ross Miller and Angela Ledgerwood, “New Again: Frank Gehry,” *Inter-view Magazine*, January 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Celik, Zeynep, *Urban Forms and Colonial Conventions: Algiers under French Rule*, (University of California Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Alejandro Zaera-Polo, “Frank O. Gehry: Still Life,” in *Frank Gehry, 1957-2003*, ed. Fernando Martínez Cecilia and Richard C. Levene, (Madrid: El Croquis, 2006), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Hines, “Heavy Metal: The Education of F.O.G.,” in Rosemarie Haag Bieler, et al., *The Architecture of Frank Gehry*, (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 1986), 17.





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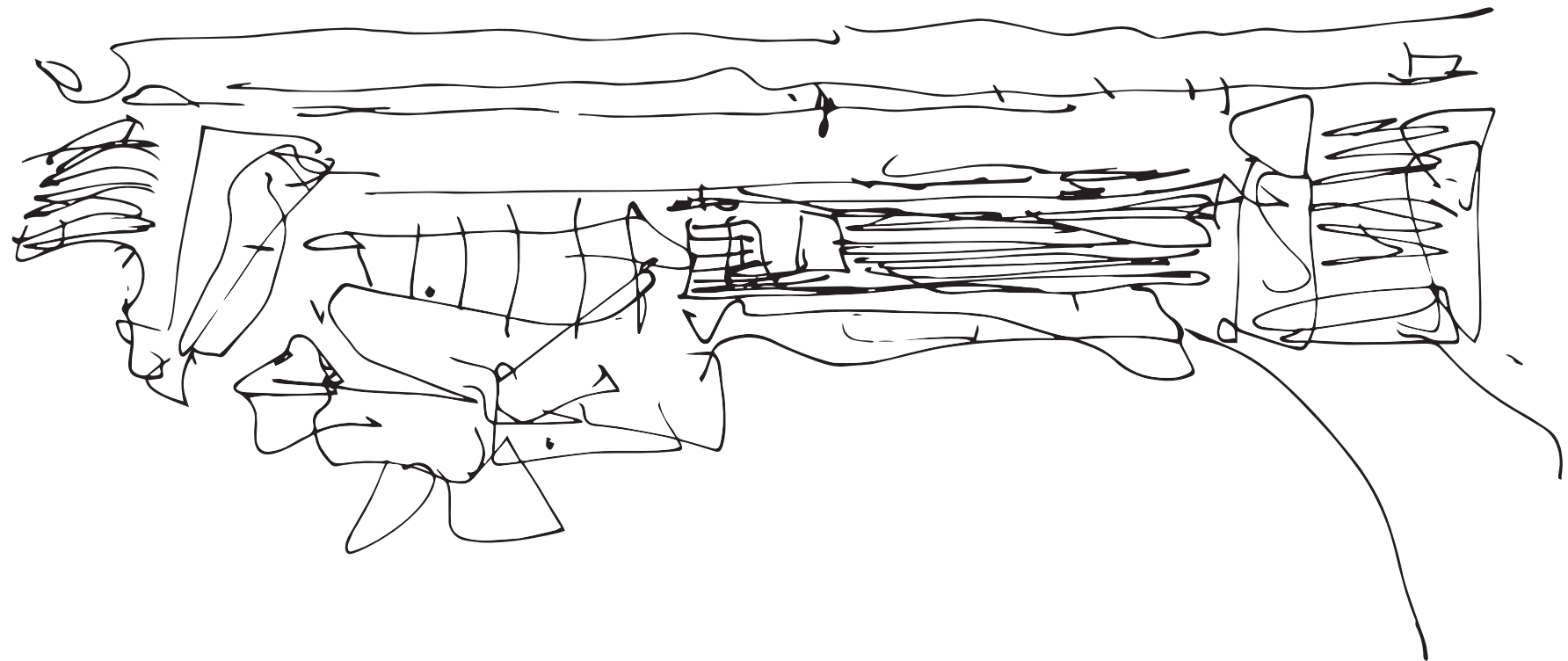
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Elementarization - segmentation

Articles by subject





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Detail of the Neuer Zollhof complex, Düsseldorf, 1999.

*Made under the tutelage of Misty Thomas-Trout for Typography Two  
at the University of Dayton, December, 2017.*

Typefaces from the ITC Franklin Gothic and Bembo families.