

Frank gehry's iac building essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Frank Gehry is an architect, who straddles the boundary between architecture and sculpture. For him, space is not only a canvas on which to draw his aesthetic desire, but he also is a firm believer in the need for synergy of urban parameters with new architectural gesture. Instead of remaining beholden to existing paradigms, he instead focuses on new architectural possibilities that come from generating innovative form as a landmark of the urban boundary, with advanced technology. Frank Gehry's abstract approach to architecture makes the form free from the limit of structure and maximizes spatial diversity of interior space and exposed public space. Frank Gehry undermines the formulaic order of urban architecture through deconstructing and transforming social parameters. He accepts the inevitable social demands, but reforms as many components of style with his logic; straight line is changed to curved line, and vertical cubes are divided and twisted. Building a city, for Gehry, is an act of showing the forces at work in the process of construction - but also in the tumult that informs existence. In the IAC Building, Frank Gehry has created just one of a group of projects in New York City that show a collective desire among the city's designers to raise the ante when it comes to creativity. The era of bland buildings, just one of the blights to hit art between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War, appears to be coming to an end. However, in this building, the most decisive rules are the ones he did not break.

Gehry has long been in conflict with the major forces of architecture and design in New York City. As Denise Brown (1971) writes, " In the movement from low art to high art lies an element of the deferral of judgment.

Judgment is withheld in the interest of understanding and receptivity" (Brown, 1971). However, Gehry had had a difficult time convincing city planners to withhold that judgment. He had attempted to get a significant commission in the city for decades before at last landing the IAC commission. This building is part of a collection of highly visible towers, a part of the city's attempt to change a loud portion of the West Side Highway into some beautiful promenade along the city's waterfront. The socialites in New York City who had once turned their noses up to the work of Frank Gehry would now, in a twist of fate, gather there. The building has three high-rise apartment buildings from Richard Meier nearby, as well as another apartment tower designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, just on the other side of West 19th Street (Ourousoff 2007).

Gehry's building looks most dramatic from a long distance. If one looks at it from a distance of several blocks, the odd chiseling of the exterior makes it look like an unusual mirror of the sky. The building almost seems about to dissolve into the air when looking at it from the west. If one walks around and look at the IAC Building from the north, though, symmetry begins to develop, and the individual sections of the building take on a sharper edge. Instead of a wispy, cloudy eminence, it becomes more like a set of sails on an otherworldly ship, about to heat out to sea. If one goes around and looks at the building from the southern side, it looks more conventional, as the blocky forms become more apparent. The fact that the building does not look the same from any two perspectives gives it a sense of intrigue and mystery, and it mirrors Gehry's long-standing belief in the importance of context - a variety of Impressionism lacquered onto architecture. Indeed, the form of the

building almost takes on the value of symbol, hearkening back to the iconography that played such a crucial role in ancient architecture, ranging from the symbols on Egyptian temples to the Latin cross shape that formed most early Christian basilicas (Venturi & Brown, 1995). The sails almost seem to be holding themselves in place against the noise of the city; the blocks on the south side of the building give the tower an aura of stability as the brick buildings begin to rise on the eastern side.

However, this mutability of shape, depending on the actual point of view of the audience, is where most of interest in Gehry's IAC Building ends. It is true that the unique shape of the building's facade required innovative construction solutions. Many of the supporting columns are tilted rather than vertical, creating an unusual shape for the underlying skeleton. Curving and free flowing forms required a material more malleable than steel to provide the building's support. What emerged is an intricate system of reinforced concrete slabs and columns. However, the raw energy that informed much of Gehry's early work is strangely missing. When he was a younger designer, he often talked about how he wanted to include the raw power of the construction process in the finished product (Ourousoff, 2007). When viewers came by, he wanted them to see forms still at war with one another, materials fighting, and building rending themselves apart to show what lies beneath the exterior. In the middle portion of his career, when his buildings became more surreal, the curvatures would still reveal the inner realities of buildings.

Here, though, the IAC building has conventional lobby entries, still it gives looks from a distance to be a wondrous undertaking of fairly traditional

uniformity. There is a horizontal pattern of white bands along the windows that work to control the admission of light. The window frames form a neat grid, not even as asymmetrical as Mondrian's grids. It looks like something one might see in a catalog, rather than looking like something raw and open. This fashionable look moves to the lobby. While the video wall along the back will show either abstract color works or video art, the look is again conventional in its narcissism. Ultimately, what the viewer will consume is his or her own appearance.

Moving on into the building does not make things much better. The composition, which had been tame, now just gets stiff. The two-story atrium provides a breathtaking view of the Hudson River and the Chelsea Piers. This is the form of setting that once would have inspired Gehry to show turbulence and chaos. However, while there is the curvature in the staircase, it looks more like something one might find in the back of a Pier One store. There is nothing in this space that has not been approved, as seems, by a corporate committee. While the service stairwell, of all things, is a visionary pathway of exposed concrete that gives the walker a dizzying view of what lies below, what is in the public sphere is a bit bland, at least on the inside.

There are other attempts at insubordination against the institutions of architecture, such as the sixth-floor corporate terrace. The odd curvature of one of the windows forces the use of asymmetrical patchwork, but the final result is more unusual than dissident. It is, in the final analysis, a bit disappointing that Gehry had to wait so long to receive a commission in New York City. By this time, he has apparently decided to pull his punches, leaving behind an elegantly designed piece that will stand for decades;

however, a piece that many other architects could have conceived, as well. When one thinks of Gehry, one thinks of identities foiled, plots overturned, broken rules. His vision for a city is for a collection of buildings that identify the deepest urges of those who live and work there, as well as the conflicts that take place inside them. This requires a high-density approach to construction, which stands in conflict with, say, the layout of such sprawled-out cities as Los Angeles. As Reyner Banham puts it, the people who live in L. A. find themselves “almost entirely in single-storey houses surrounded by a style of horticulture which is a cross between the Anglo-Saxon tradition and the tropical...what is confusing is that the basic human habitat offered by the house and garden is the same in exclusive Beverly Hills as it is in the ghettos like Watts” (Banham, 1988). This uniformity would not square well with Gehry, who does not even like that a building gives off a uniform appearance to viewers from all directions.

For centuries, architecture focused on the practical, with the exception of building a house of worship, and a residence for the local ruler. For the vast majority, buildings were thrown up to protect against the elements. However, as standards of living have improved, it has become possible for architectural considerations of aesthetics to become more accessible to larger sections of the population. Frank Gehry is one of the architects who view the buildings of a city as an expression of its soul, as a fusion between the natural and the necessary. However, that fusion does not have to be formalistic, or disruptive to nature. Instead, it should capture its surroundings, both the natural and the existential; the idea is that the process of life, construction, making, - all that appears in the contortions of

the building. This is not an easy way to build, and it is not cheap or convenient. In other parts of the world, matters of price and prefabrication drive construction - not so for Gehry.