

JANE GREGORIUS

Gridded Church #20, 2009
monotype, 30 X 22 in



courtesy the artist

DAN WHITE

Frank Gehry's Spirit of Play A Conversation in Santa Cruz

It takes a certain amount of arrogance to write a single sentence, let alone an essay or—God forbid—an entire book, knowing that someone else is going to read it and occupy it for a while. It takes even more self-regard to bear up against the backlash that creative people must face if their work makes any kind of public impression. Just imagine how much self-regard it would take to design a building. Every time I read about highly successful architects, I think to myself, “How can they stand it? How can they bear the weight of their enormous egos?”

After all, the writer of a bad book or a terrible story hasn't built something that must stand for generations. People don't have to go to work every day inside his short story, or take classes or undergo surgery inside her novel. People don't have to walk through someone's prose on the way to the subway. I've always wondered how architects handle the expectation, the crush of public opinion, and the constant compromises and budget limitations, without losing their minds in the process.

The legendary architect Frank Gehry offered some insight into these questions during his recent appearance at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), where he had a public dialogue about creativity with his official biographer, Paul Goldberger, a contributing editor for *Vanity Fair*. Gehry, famous for looping, billowing, swirling works that function as sculptures as well as buildings, has a ready answer to these questions: In the face of such pressures, creative-minded people must pass “through the looking glass” and embrace a sense of anarchic childishness that will help them overcome self-consciousness, deal with the inevitable setbacks, and cope with backlash if it comes their way.

To channel our best creative energies, we must embrace the inner child. Perhaps that sounds a little hokey, self-helpy, or glib—and in most circumstances, I would agree with you. But consider the source: an uncompromising, risk-taking, and sometimes curmudgeonly figure who often talks about feeling like an outsider, and who once said, “Each project, I suffer like I'm starting over again in life. There's a lot of healthy insecurity that fuels this stuff.” Gehry clearly drives himself hard for his work, and is pained at the idea of repeating himself. He is unafraid to fail, to miss the mark; and he's had to face up to ridicule—and at one point, even a few murmured death