



## Twin Ghosts: The Haunting Ground

**ERIC DARTON ELSEWHERE ON-LINE**

["The Janus Face of Architectural Terrorism"](#) from *Open Democracy*.

["Something Above Democracy': The Port Authority and the World Trade Center"](#) from *culturefront Online*.

["El World Trade Center tenía una historia oculta"](#) from *EL PAIS* [in Spanish.]

-links research, Greg Partridge

**Frigate:** Each of you was involved artistically with the World Trade Center through *Art on the Beach*, a series of multimedia projects executed on the landfill created near the World-Trade-Center site. Can you say something about the nature of these projects and how they affected your sense of the WTC?

**Darton:** My experience of performing on the landfill (in Uwe Mengel's play *Mushrooms*, sited in and around Jodie Culkin's dugout sculptures) was exhilarating quite apart from the performance itself. To me, the epoch of the beach and the period before the advent of Battery Park City were the tower's glory days. I'd always wished I could have visited Brasilia before they landscaped it, while the red earth was still vying with the structures, while there was still a rawness to the just-conquered ground that is very un-urban. So the idea that the landfill was this urban frontier was exciting—there were some very fine projects done there, but really, the beach was enough—the artwork was superfluous. All sorts of transgressive acts went on there too, so the official artworks were part of the domestication process. We artists serve to lay down the psychological infrastructure—our "improvements" to the land make it safe for the Sam Lefraks to put up their horror shows.

But come to think of it, performing on the beach was probably the moment I went "click" with the trade center, because from where we were encamped in the sand, the towers had to be taken in in a totally unmediated way. There was the river, the tidal river, the ocean really, the sand and then the mountains. While the WTC was there, Battery Park City always felt like a fig leaf. *Don't look—look!*

**Pontius:** My experience with the "surcharge," as the landfill



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was known at the time, focused on making a place of performance from such an unlikely material as sand, being sure to incorporate the sculptor's desire to make an object. The sculptor's idea seems eerie now: an object crash landing into the site at the mark of the cross and fusing the sand into a glass cross.

My role was to bridge between the two worlds of physical object (sculptor) and space-time(dancers). The Port Authority or Creative Time had allowed us the use of a bulldozer to fabricate our project. I directed the creation of a large ring of sand with a hollow center. The bulldozer driver did not see that as a firm directive and created a horseshoe or U-shape next to one of the hills of sand at the edge of the Creative Time area. So it goes in the world of construction—the drawings are just for the architects. At the performance, the audience entered the performance space through a narrow valley and sat on the sides of the ring. The dancers appeared above and in front with the Trade Towers forming the back-drop. During the rehearsal, the QEII sailed by. What a wonderful moment—seeing the human forms in comparison to the horizontal ocean vessel and, turning around, against the vertical land-bound building forms! Years later, I loved to go to the observation deck at the top of the towers where I could look down on remaining vestiges. The whole site took on the aura of ancient archeology.



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**Frigate:** After the events of September 11th, a psychiatrist on Long Island noticed a remarkable upsurge of distress among children who are twins. Dr. Stan Shapiro writes: "The psychological response seen in some twin youngsters sensing the anguish and fear in the

adults in their lives left them with nightmares of what had happened to twins, and a frightening anticipation of what was going to. These highly personalized responses are documented in the psychoanalytic literature: <http://apsa.org/cgi-bin/jbsearch.pl> (keyword: twins)." Eric, your web site has quite a [repository of "twin" imagery](#). Can each of you comment on the power of twinness or doubleness as it relates to the events of September 11th?

**Darton:** I'm not surprised by the psychiatrist's observation of increased anxiety in twins after 9/11. Twins ought to be worried given how eagerly we seem to be turning to the task of annihilating perceived anomalies. We have a very ambivalent relationship with twin-ness. There is a horror associated with twins, as well as a wonder at the cosmic joke of duplication. I remember my delight when, as a

child, I'd find a double-yoked egg—what good fortune! But there are, I think, cultures that consider twins a "mistake" of nature, or a terrible omen, to be eliminated as quickly as possible.

In this case, the horror of the WTC lay not so much in the random occurrence of twins, as in the instrumental cloning power of hegemonic globalism writ large on the skyline. And this structure conceived in the gray dawn of bio-engineering. I can't help but think of poor Dolly the sheep—she's really an engineering miracle—but a wreck as an animal. What fragility, what degradation, comes bundled with such awesome power.

There's an exhibit up now at the Metropolitan Museum: *Splendid Isolation: The Art of Easter Island*. One striking piece represents two human faces, about 1/2 life-sized, joined back to back to form a bifacial or Janus-faced head. The sculpture dates from the 1840s and is painted in brick reds, browns and grays on backcloths stretched over a wooden frame. According to the description in the display case, it may depict a legendary warrior named Rau-hiva-aringa-erua ("Twin Two-Faces") who had one face looking forward, the other backward. During a battle between two rival chiefs, one of whom was Rau-hiva-aringa-erua's father, the rear face saw an enemy approaching and told the front face to turn around and look. When the front face refused, the two began arguing and ignored the enemy, who killed them—or him—depending on how you look at it.

I've also been very intrigued by an Iroquois belief in a pair of twin brothers: personifications of complementary generative and destructive forces that need to be held in balance. One brother creates beneficent plants, the other, unwittingly, poisons. But they're brothers—sprung of the same womb, the same egg.

I suspect that somewhere beneath the discussion of what to do with the WTC site lurks an ancient conflict between Puritan and Catholic values in the face of the New World—a reencounter with core identities—and, literally, strata of the city's accumulated history. Now that we're digging down to Indian Manhattan. . . .

**Pontius:** Architects and builders have been using the compositional device of twins since the beginning of time. Eric's thoughts really tie this to myth and beyond. In a more commercial sense, another tower, using the same design, doubled the area for rent and doubled the profits. The towers were built to produce income, lots of it. The simplicity of the forms underscores this. Double the income, two towers, please, no extra frills. After the attack, double the horror.

**Frigate:** Geraldine, your fellow architect Cynthia Rock has

observed that no-one would miss the twin towers if it were not for the people who lost their lives inside them. This is an emotional truth for many if not most people. Yet the controversy over the future of the site, whether it is to be given over largely to a memorial structure or park or returned to commercial real-estate development, suggests that some people miss the buildings. Indeed, right after the event, many architects, businesspeople and politicians went on record with rationales for replication of the buildings. Are these people to be condemned for their avarice, their ambition, and their arrogant will to exercise power? Or is the truth more complicated, and, if so, in what ways?

**Pontius:** The site is public land. Recently an article in the *Washington Post* pointed out that the developer with the ground lease has been given permission to reconstruct only one of the buildings burned and destroyed as the



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two main towers fell. What, if anything, is built on the remainder of the site will be subject to the mind-numbing and glacial public process of large-scale decision-making in New York (and elsewhere). For once, I am happy that is the case. Although the Towers were ugly and represented power and money to the extent that they became symbolic of it, the fact remains that the people of New York and New Jersey, represented by the Port Authority, approved of them enough to foot the bill. Should this be the decision of the people again—and it is doubtful that it can or should—so be it. Now, it is time to go forward slowly. Land-development policy for this public site must not be left to any one individual. It is essential the people be given the opportunity to voice a public collective will.

**Darton:** I agree that the planning for the "sixteen acres" needs to be radically democratized—as does planning elsewhere—but I take issue with Geraldine's implication that there was some sort of direct democratic process involved a generation ago when the towers were conceived. The WTC was never put up for a referendum in either state. This wasn't about public approval; it was a demonstration of what could be imposed from the top down—dropped on the city, as it were. The Governors of New York and New Jersey pushed the trade center and PATH deals through their respective legislatures, which dutifully rubber-stamped them. Then too, the whole premise behind having the Port Authority build the trade center was that the public bill-footing would be well hidden, since Authority projects are not part of state budgets but are paid through in tolls, et cetera.

As to what happens down there now, my gut tells me to let the site alone for the time being. Leave the ruin as a haunting ground, and as a hunting ground for the most desperate and adventurous among us. There is great value in it as an open pit full of toxicity and danger. And buried Krugerands. Greenwich Street runs right up the middle of the site and is, after all, the "natural" boundary of the island. Left to its own devices, the whole area reverts to a marsh. The crater, like the WTC and everything else we make, is nothing more than an intersection of desire and materials. But we'll end up with another fig leaf, I'm sure— this time covering over the forbidden, monstrous cavity. A quite brilliant artist from Ireland—who works as a waitress at the café I frequent—recently observed that the American imperative is: "preserve the oblivion at all costs."

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