

BEDFORD SQUARE.

DALSTON.

## vanishing twins.

s.jacob

Twinning transforms the normal state of things. Multiplied, individuality dissolves. Duplicated, originality becomes slippery. Twinness's qualities of radical similarity or radical difference present, simultaneously, perfect equilibrium and aggressive antagonism. Being twinned destroys conventional qualities inherent in the singular yet generates others. Twinship acts both a force of order and of moral collapse. It both constructs and destroys.

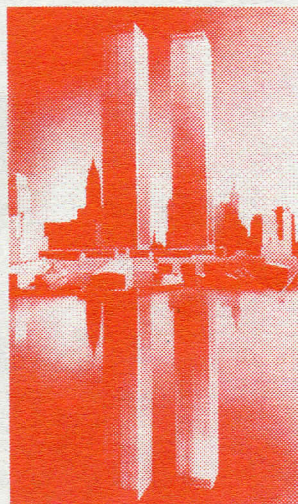
Think of the hyperporno fantasy of identical twins, of crystal clear high fidelity reproduction, of pristine symmetry, of Narcissus in love with his own reflection.

Yet also think of the uncanny duplication of the clone, the psychological trauma of Dostoevsky's *Double*. Think of the evil twin, dramatised so effectively in *Superman II* where the evil twin uses its superpowers to cause chaos rather than order. Think of the artistic and legal disturbances caused by the copy and the fake. Think too of the myth of the doppelgänger in which an encounter with your double is a precursor to your own death. Reading Hillel Schwartz's *Culture of the Copy* we encounter biological theories that suggest that many of us have, in utero, killed our twin.

In the founding myth of Rome, twins Romulus and Remus (having been left to die as babies) were saved and suckled by a wolf. Once grown, the twins returned to restore their grandfather to the throne. Here they act as perfect twins, bound by blood and experience into a singular act of restoration. As perfect twins, they left to found a city. Yet an argument over which hill to build this new city on led to a confrontation in which Romulus killed Remus. Rome, then, according to myth is born out of the twins perfect union and their fratricidal difference. As in Schwartz's biology class, Rome is born out of the death of a twin.

The twin towers of the World Trade Centre were the architectural manifestation of the perfect twin. Yamasaki's towers stated the double in equilibrium. Each tower was an image of the other, *neither an original, nor a doppelgänger*. This perfection, gargantuan on the Manhattan skyline, proved antagonistic enough to attract its destruction. The attacks were a doubled horrific spectacular, turning the twins into a singular entity of rubble & dust. Its destroyers hoped that the death of this perfect twin would prove powerful enough to transform the world.

As the Twin Towers collapsed they gained another twin. Pruitt Igoe, a public housing project of the 1950s



designed by the same architect, was famously demolished in an act inscribed into architectural history as the 'death of Modernism'. Yamasaki, through events beyond his control, is now associated with the two most significant architectural demolitions of last 50 years. They are paired despite their difference in form, time and place, becoming twins in the frozen images of their collapse; the moment of their vanishing, the moment that inscribed them into a final significance as architecture intersected violently with ideology. Coincidental twins whose destruction antagonistically forced new worlds and new forms of order into existence.

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## double trouble.

J.self

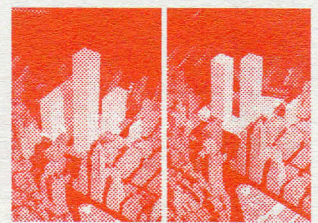
August 1968, the summer is drawing to a close: in Paris, police have just reoccupied the Sorbonne; in Iraq, Saddam Hussein (after a CIA-backed coup) has just occupied Bagdad. On the big screen *2001: A Space Odyssey* & *Planet of the Apes* are battling for best picture, on the little screen troops are battling the Viet Kong. In low earth orbit, Apollo 7 is testing the Lunar Module; in lower Manhattan, the North Tower is beginning to rise — bulldozers are removing what will be a million cubic metres of earth from the WTC site, depositing it into the Hudson & creating six sandy blocks: Battery Park City (see reverse).

The first tenants would move into the South Tower a week after the last Apollo (17) left the moon's surface. Thus the construction of the Twin Towers neatly coincides with the height of the space race and the Cold War — the apotheosis of the 20th century's social and civil rights movements. The towers' thinly veiled religious grandeur, rising from Gothic-arched lobbies of shining glass & steel, made a double impression on the skyline: twins. Two raised fingers facing East; two monolithic chickens in one pot.

Visiting New York frequently as a child, the crystalline magnificence of these structures fascinated me. They still do. I am now seizing on the last opportunity to write about them while they still hold cultural currency, indeed while they still hold some of their value as real things. Because by the 20th anniversary they will almost certainly have ceased to exist as buildings and become only the protagonists of a metaphorical event, culminating in their ritual destruction. It is already largely the case, 9/11 is inextricably associated with the subsequent hubris of Afghanistan, Iraq, and perhaps America's nemesis: the Global Financial Crisis. It is hardly surprising that recent newspaper tributes compared a fractured façade with a failing economic system, one that has socialised losses and privatised profits.

Thinking back to the Apollos, there is a strange power to the image of the last space shuttle touching down two months back, as though the wheel has come full circle, & the whole empire is deploying drag chutes.

There is another allegorical significance to the 9/11 event: the fact that the towers were twins. Originally Yamasaki designed one mega-tower, but was forced to 'twin (twin) it' producing two half-towers. The genetic information of the original was duplicated, but in fact the total identity was divided. Thus 'the twin' possesses a strange status: simultaneously an independent *and* codependent entity. I sometimes wonder what it would be

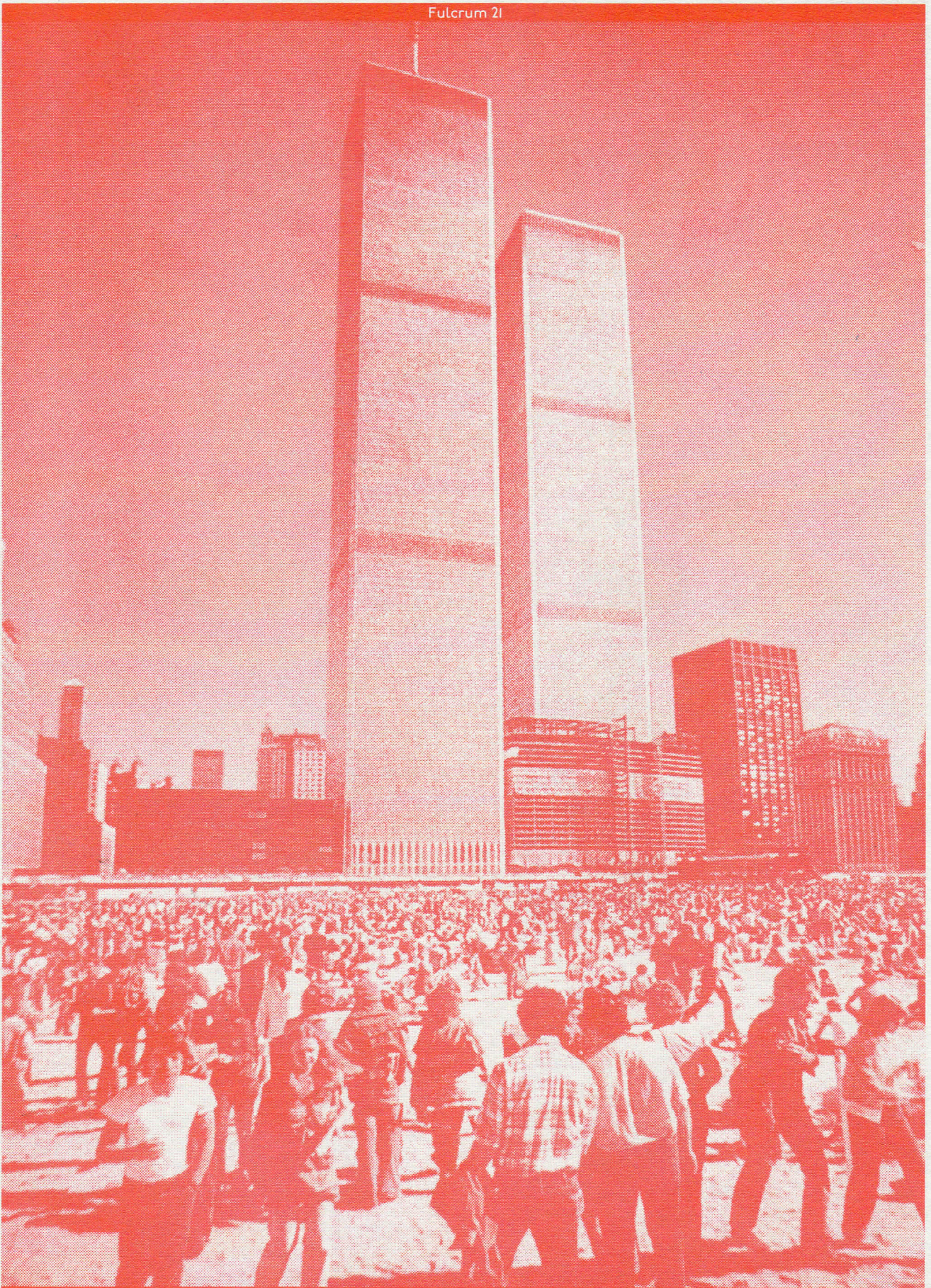


*Yamasaki's wtc study models: first as mega-tower, then twins.*

like if one of the Twins had survived, what that would mean. Would a single tower constitute a reaffirmation of its individuality, or only highlight its incompleteness? When the first tower was duplicated ('twinning') was there then an original *and its twin*? Or were they the referent twins of some other, invisible, nonexistent, tower?

Looking back ten years it is difficult to accurately capture the sense of irrational and unspecified fear that gripped society. A world of Faber-Castell national alert spectrums, anthrax & flag lapel pins. Dangerous and incompetent leaders. An age of anxiety coupled with a decade of decadence. And in a sense 2011 is the bizarre twin of 1968: Saddam is dead, the space programme is over, social struggle means London looting, the towers (as buildings) still belong to a nonexistent reality. And through it all architects are still the agents of a deeply flawed and ethically irresponsible economic model. Though perhaps fittingly, we are now actually, as well as morally, bankrupt.

*Jack Self edits Fulcrum.*



The newly occupied World Trade Center, New York — as seen from the landfilled beach of Battery Park City. c.1974.