

Bahrampour, Tara. "An Artist's Inspiration Lives On in His Mind."
The New York Times, September 30, 2001, p. CY7.

An Artist's Inspiration Lives On in His Mind

By TARA BAHRAMPOUR

ALLAN WEXLER, architect and conceptual artist, moved to New York in 1973, just as the World Trade Center was being completed. At the time, the twin towers were controversial among architects and urban critics, many of whom objected to the oversize, blocky structures that had so radically altered the skyline.

But Mr. Wexler admired the buildings, and in the mid-1970's, through his conceptual art projects, he mounted a series of projects in their defense. His work included renditions of the skyline with three, four or more towers, as well as depictions of the towers as canvases upon which images could be drawn by manipulating the pattern of lights in the windows at night. Mr. Wexler was also interested in how the towers changed faces over the course of a day, their striated aluminum sides reflecting nuances in light and weather.

"I always saw it as a sort of Tower of Babel or Jacob's Ladder," he said in an interview earlier this year, "an attempt to penetrate through the cloud layer and attempt enlightenment."

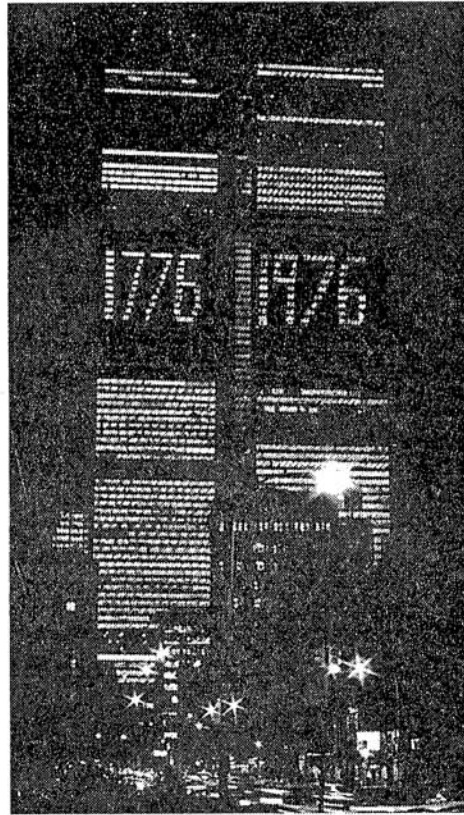
Here are excerpts from a conversation with Mr. Wexler, who now teaches architecture at Pratt Institute in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, one day after the attack on the towers:

"I was looking at the buildings not at face value, but as a reflection, an image of how the sky affected the skyline. It absorbs the sky; it reflects the sky."

"Most people saw it as a static, bland structure. But it was so neutral that it became a barometer that transformed minute by minute by minute. By photographing it four times a day, it radically changed each time. The day was what transformed the building. Whereas when buildings are complex they don't have the ability to do that."

On a project that involved manipulating the lights in the windows in patterns that could depict messages or pictures:

"I was interested in the idea of binary surfaces. But originally, before the energy crisis, the World Trade Center had been built so there was no way to turn off the lights. So my plan would have involved pulling a window shade down on



Allan Wexler

Allan Wexler imagined the trade center as a giant bicentennial billboard.

certain nights to block the light. Every office would have had a calendar of when to pull down their shades, a cataloging of various images that the World Trade Center could then turn itself into."

"I would tell my students that it was really the urban stage of the world. People used it as a forum, and now, unfortunately, politically as well."

"It is now stronger as a monument. We'll never forget it. It will live in our memories. It's like the grassy knoll. It becomes a metaphysical structure at this point."

PRO AND CON

When They Were Young

Some of the early appraisals of the twin towers:

"These are big buildings but they are not great architecture. The grill-like metal facade stripes are curiously without scale. They taper into the more widely spaced columns of 'Gothic trees' at 10 lower stories, a detail that does not express structure so much as tart it up. The Port Authority has built the ultimate Disneyland fairytale blockbuster. It is General Motors Gothic."

(Ada Louise Huxtable, *The New York Times*, April 5, 1973)

"The only way to grasp the enormity and the ugliness of New York's controversial World Trade Center is by air. From up there, flying across the Hudson River from New Jersey, the eye perceives the center's two aluminum, steel and glass towers standing like maidens of innocence against the grimy landscape of Lower Manhattan. The World Trade Center is an esthetic failure, a classic attempt to compromise too many motives and ideologies at once, soured further by a dose of hubris."

(*Newsweek*, July 2, 1973)

"Seemingly defying the elements, the twin towers pierced the low-hanging clouds and rain to rise majestically over a city of skyscrapers. No greater monument could attest to the will of man than the towers of the World Trade Center themselves."

(*New York Daily News*, April 5, 1973)

"As presently designed this fearful instrument of uricide will be not only the tallest, but unquestionably one of the ugliest buildings in the world. . . . Worse, these incredible giants just stand there, artless and dumb, without any relationship to anything, not even to each other."

(Wolf von Eckhardt, *Harper's Magazine*, May 1966)