



World Trade Center

Four Poems

Timothy E. G. Bartel

1.

George W. Bush's Bullhorn Speech, Ground Zero, September 14, 2001

*I want you all to know, I want
You all to know America
Today is down on bended knee
In prayer for the people whose
Whole lives were lost, for workers who
Worked here, for families who mourn.
The nation stands with people of
New York, New Jersey, people of
Connecticut. We mourn the loss
Of thousands of our citizens.
I hear you! I can hear you! And
The rest of all the world can hear you!
And the people who knocked down
These buildings all will hear us soon!*

2.

The Pitch, 1961

“A center for Manhattan—think
Of it: the Port Authority
Could take up forty floors or so,
And then we rent all that’s above

“To who will pay the most. How high?
A thousand feet at least, and why
Not top the Empire State and build
The tallest towers in the world?

“Yes: plural. Towers. Two of them,
We’ll call them twins; they’ll squeeze the wind
That blows off of the ocean toward
The mainland till it sings and speeds

“To westward like a dream. There’ll be
Some drama to their building and
Unveiling, kick the neighborhood
A notch or two above the north

“And add another profile to
The city skyline for the new
Millennium, where New York still
Predominates the wealth of men.

“Let’s see what’s there right now:
Just Radio Row—old timey shacks—
A cinch to knock those eye-sores down,
Sledge out the low foundation so

“The Hudson doesn’t slop on in,
Then get to work with concrete or
Whatever our new architect
Decides. Let’s get someone that does

“Those boxy things in only glass,
That form huge mirrors in the sky,
So even planes could see themselves
If they could safely fly that low.”

3.

The Architect, hired 1963

Minoru Yamasaki won
The Center contract: Japanese
In ancestry, though US born,
Who hid his parents in New York

From forced internment in the West.
He was afraid of heights, so slimmed
The windows in his buildings down
'Til they were almost strips of light

Instead of causing vertigo
With wide horizons. These new twins
Would have those narrow windows in
A silver—almost white—facade.

Two problems faced him: first, to fit
The elevators in and still
Have room for spacious offices:
So Yamasaki stacked them up,

Three separate tiers of lifts, one on
The other, on the other, with
A lobby at the top of each,
As if three buildings climbed upon

Each other's backs to catch a glimpse
Of dawn on Mississippi, or
The glinting of Pacific waves
Three thousand miles away. And now

The second problem: how to do
Away with typical supports
That fill the floors of towers with
A forest's worth of pillars: he

Put hollow trusses at the four
Far corners of each floor, stretched webs
Of vertical and tilted tubes
Designed to weather any strike, and stand.

4.

The Towers, 1966–2001

You could not call them *boxy things*,
For chamfered corners introduced
New planes into the towers' shapes
As if the major square both made

Was haunted by the spirit of
Another building, never built,
Whose perpendiculars emerged
Just at the corners of real space.

You could not call their windows mere
Repeated, dreary rectangles,
For at the bottom two and top
Two floors, the grid splayed out, became

A row of gothic arches like
The walls of pale cathedrals in
Medieval winter sun, when Goths
Still nursed their grudge for Roman rule,

And Romans feared the northern sack.
There never were twin skyscrapers
In NYC made just of glass
And steel in blank right angles—that

Was sloppy rumor; what was there
Was history in snaking lines
That curved from old-traditional
To new-mechanical and back,

The echo of a century
That tried to sever all its ties
With what was past, but found that art
Had rounded backward from the stars,

Had plunged into the still-numb soil
And raised the churches up again
To startle men with arch and stone
And pose that re-embodied peace.