

## Chapter 9: When Architects Attack

"It has been known for some time that Libeskind and his wife are in fact Raelians," an anonymous architect posted to an online forum, referring to the cult whose followers believe life on Earth was seeded by UFOs and whose leaders were just then in the news for their home-cooked attempts at human cloning. "The Libeskinds have incorporated many Raelian beliefs and systems in much of their work, most notably in their recent WTC proposal, as a kind of landing platform for future generations. The recent cloning news attributed to the sect has great implications for the Libeskinds...and their hopes for world domination."

Coming only ten days after the press fiesta in the Winter Garden, that libel was among the first and perhaps the most creative that would be leveled at the architect and Nina Libeskind, his wife, business partner, chief political strategist, and--with her reduced height, cropped gray hair, European-Jewish antecedents, and on-message intensity--nearly his clone. As they rose to a prominent, and then a central, position in the redevelopment, the Libeskinds drew fire from their colleagues and returned it redoubled.

Throughout the intrigues surrounding the fate of the World Trade Center site, pettiness had been present and the personal was never out of bounds; it was Andrew Cuomo's "coat holding" attack on George Pataki that had helped set in motion the events that made the Libeskinds' participation possible. But in 2003, with the national and international media now fully engaged and the redevelopment achieving its full potential for the baroque, the art of the takedown reached new highs and lows. And as with every other related conflict, this discharge of enmities would rattle through the process to find itself reflected in form.

With the non-binding Innovative Design Study now a winner-take-all competition, with architects marketing their personas alongside their designs, the stage was set for a Herculean street fight. Tarring the Libeskinds as alien-worshipping cloners was not likely to destroy what was accurately seen as their early advantage, but it indicated the extremes to which their enemies would go. And in New York, they had many enemies waiting for them. They would soon make more.

\*\*

From *Sixteen Acres: Architecture and the Outrageous Struggle for the Future of Ground Zero* (Metropolitan Books) by Philip Nobel

Copyright 2005 by Philip Nobel