DUALITY: THE BOND BETWEEN TWINS

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by Lynette Ann Spencer entitled DUALITY: THE BOND BETWEEN TWINS be accepted as fulfilling, in part, requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Art and the Book.

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THESIS STATEMENT

When reviewing case studies of identical twins and comparing them to twin artists, and artists who are fascinated by twins, one can see the influence of perceived identity and the complexity of the genetic duo.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Identical twins are a unique form of biological replication that fascinate many singletons. Often, twins see aspects of themselves in their co-twin but they also recognize each other as individuals. Many people ask identical twins what it is like being a twin: a question for which there is no answer. Since identical twins don’t know what it’s like to be a non-twin, a comparison is difficult. Twins have a bond that an individual will never be able to experience, a connection that defies explanation even to themselves. When identical twins walk down the street, singletons glance or stare, intrigued by the idea of two people who look exactly the same. According to one twin interviewed in “Twins on Twins”

The best gift for anyone in life is to be a twin,... Being an identical twin means never to know alienation, disapproval or rejection, because one’s twin is always there, somewhere in the universe, the mirror self, radiating this shared acceptance, no matter what the circumstances, whether happy or unhappy.¹

This automatic acceptance can sometimes make twins introverted, their personalities self-contained; they may also often act as a single unit.

Identity and individuality are of particular interest because pairs of identical twins are not exact replicas, as most would assume. Research continues to grow as scientists and psychologists attempt to understand the very different minds of the genetically identical. Through the study of twins, science hopes to gain a better understanding of human behavior, the value of individuality and the unique situation of identical twinship.

A leading scholar on twins, John Lash, writes, “Behaviorally, most twins are quite normal people, content to pursue their lives like everyone else. What does distinguish

them is often an uncanny sense of symbiosis, the feeling of living simultaneously with or through the body, mind and emotions of the other.”

Exact biological replicas exist in the sense that one hundred percent DNA matches are certainly real. However, these matches are not as exact in either appearance or personality as one might expect.

Reviewing twin artists, or art in which twins are the primary subject, provides insight into how identity manifests itself or is perceived. Examining the interactions of twins can yield results that are predictable and intriguing. As a twin and an artist, I am interested in scientific studies about twin identity and genetics, and how their analyses/theories relate to twin artists and twin-based art. When reviewing case studies of identical twins and comparing them to twin artists, and artists who are fascinated by twins, one can see the influence of perceived identity and the complexity of the genetic duo.

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 CHAPTER 2: THE SCIENCE OF TWINS

Fascination with twin culture has been the catalyst for scientists and psychologists to study twins in various circumstances and investigate their similarities and inherent differences. Delving into the unique relationship twins have with one another, and contrasting that with the life of the individual has become an important area of research. “There are now so many scientists seeking to study twins that the annual festival of twins in Twinsburg, Ohio, allows researchers to set up carnival tents, where browsing twins can stop to take stress tests or fill out questionnaires about their sex lives.”3 Nationwide there are registries that keep track of twins, some are very specific:

[T]he University of Minnesota keeps track of more than 8,000 twin pairs; Virginia Commonwealth University operates the ‘Virginia 30,000,’ which follows 15,000 twin pairs plus their siblings, spouses and parents; there are major registries in Kansas, California, and Kentucky, and smaller ones all over the country. The Veterans Administration maintains records of all twins who served in the Second World War and Vietnam. Pennsylvania State University, with several other institutions, oversees the Black Elderly Twin Study, which uses Medicare records to track down black twins throughout the United States.4

The tracking of twins reflects the assumption that answers to human behavior can be found within the pairs. Some test subjects undergo 50 hours of testing within a single week.5 The twins are usually tested separately so they do not influence each others’ answers. The types of twins studied include: identical (monozygotic), fraternal (dizygotic), twins separated at birth, mirror twins, conjoined twins, and twins where one has a physical or mental health problem. This research only begins to scratch the surface, but provide some great examples of how twins are studied, and what similarities and variations are noted.

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3 Lawrence Wright. Twins and what they tell us about who we are. Wiley, 1999, 8.
5 Ibid, 46.
SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES

Starting early in fetal development, similarities and differences are readily observed in twin pairs. Many people perceive identical twins as exact copies of one another, with the same appearance and personalities, a common assumption because identical twins are precise genetic matches. However, differences can manifest before birth and certainly after. “Local events during prenatal life ensure increasing variance. No individual emerges from this period as an identical copy of someone else.” The idea of an inexact copy, and the conceit that no two people are 100% the same, leads to a quest for the things that make identical twins unique. “For identical twins, heritability accounts for all of their similarities and none of their differences.” The majority of the research about identical twins is based on twins separated at birth; research into twins who have been reared together is rare. Ironically, researchers feel that they can get more information about the likeness between twins who were raised apart and who therefore could not influence one another. (Focusing only on twins who grew up in different, if similar, environments unduly limits the scope of the investigation.) Identical twins who grow up together share a bond that is stronger than those raised apart: In ignoring this aspect of twin culture, scientists and psychologists miss the more dynamic question of how identical twins can differ even when raised in the same environment.

Identical twins Amy and Beth, separated at birth and adopted into different families in the 1960s, were the subjects of research by Dr. Peter Neubauer, a psychiatrist.

7 Ibid.
at New York University. “Neubauer believed at the time that twins posed such a burden to parents, and to themselves in the form of certain developmental hazards, that adopted twins were better off being raised separately, with no knowledge of their twinship.”

He successfully convinced the birth mother that the girls should be adopted by different families because it would be in their best interest. During the adoption process, neither adoptive family was notified that their child was a twin. However, Dr. Neubauer did inform them that the children were part of a developmental study and therefore they would have to return to the office for future testing as the child grew up.

Amy and Beth answered many of the testing questions in the same fashion, despite the differences in their upbringings. While one twin had a problematic relationship with her adoptive parents and was seen as the black sheep or the outsider, the other’s family did everything they could to make her feel part of the family unit. In the end, they had comparable IQs and were socially introverted. The twin that was made to feel included did perform better socially, but, she struggled in her personal relationships, never allowing herself to become close to anyone; her sister showed the same tendency. This study shows that a pair of identical twins, raised in different environments can still maintain their genetic likeness, which gives credence to the assertion that nature is stronger than nurture.

In her study, Entwined Lives, Nancy Segal writes about,

Identical twins Mohammad and Ali Hidari [who] came to the United States from Iran in 1984 with their parents, Daryoush and Azar. They are hardworking young men with close ties to family and friends. These brothers have remained faithful friends throughout their twenty-six years...

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8 Lawrence Wright, 1.
They grew up together and had many of the same experiences and influences. In contrast to the many studies dealing with twins separated at birth, their case offers a glimpse at what can be learned by taking a closer look at twins reared together. This study began by chance when Ali, a student in Professor Segal’s Developmental Psychology class, asked her to admit his brother into the already full course. She admitedly broke the rules out of curiosity, because having a pair of identical twins in a class simultaneously would allow her to study them. Much of what she noticed was based on appearance: Mohammad was a little heavier at birth and continued to be about 10 pounds heavier than Ali even into their adulthood. After talking to the twins, she discovered that their mother had chosen a name for her son, Mohammad Ali. When she realized she was having twins she decided to split the name, giving her firstborn the original first name and her second born son the original middle name. Their mother took a single unit, first and middle name, and broke it in two for her two sons to share. Because the twins grew up together, it is not unexpected that they would have similar interests and end up in the same college, or even the same class.

NATURE VS. NURTURE

While heredity makes identical twins similar, life experiences and environment can create differences. “Genetically identical individuals are presumed to be born with the same predispositions, and therefore should react in the same way to a given kind of household or a given style of parenting.”10 This statement, however, is often not the case, as studies from the University of Michigan and Virginia Commonwealth University show.

When looking at identical twins and how they interact with each other, it is often apparent

that one is more dominant and has a stronger, more extroverted personality.

Birth order can also affect the personalities of twins greatly. “The firstborn twin feels very special because she is number one and is often the more dominant and self-assured child.” Birth order in any household is significant, although many wouldn’t think that would be the case for twins. “Perhaps the reason why it never occurred to the developmentalists that they might be called upon to explain the personality differences between identical twins is that so little has been said about their differences. On the contrary, we’re always hearing about how amazingly alike they are.” When parents recognize the differences in their set of identical offspring they should allow them to take different paths, rather than focus on the similar attributes (identical clothing, haircuts, room decorations and the like).

PERSONALITY

The relentless focus on identical twins’ similarities raises the question of whether these siblings are ever given the chance to be different and pursue life individually, or if that would be something they would even want.

Twins have unique struggles with identity... Twins long to have their own ‘perfect’ identity separate from their co-twin, which their co-twin can accept as legitimate and worthwhile. A twin also has a distinct identity as a twin that is different from his separate identity. In essence, twins have double identities-as twins and as individual.

Individual identity is crucial, although it seems that some twins focus more on the “we” while others push away from that in search of the “I”. To the outsider, identical twins...
may seem to be exactly alike; friends and family, however can see the differences in their personalities. “Approximately 20-50% of individual differences in personality are genetically based, so genes have a somewhat lesser impact on personality traits than they do on intellectual skills.”

The limited impact of genetics on personality is one reason for parents to pay attention to differences between twins. If twins are raised as a unit, two parts of a whole, and not referred to by their own names or allowed to operate as individuals, then they will be less likely to feel comfortable pursuing their own interests, without their co-twin.

14 Nancy Segal. 70.
CHAPTER 3: ARTISTIC IMPRESSIONS IN TWINS

Scientists and psychologists are not the only ones fascinated by twins. Many artists look at twins as a phenomenal occurrence, and often focus on their similitude or the oddity of their replication. Photographer Diane Arbus was an artist fascinated by the oddity of twins. Arbus had a background in fashion photography, and opened a studio with her husband. When they divorced, she turned her focus from fashion to people in their natural state. “She did not try to romanticize her subjects. Instead she acknowledged their complexity.”

Her photographs exploit the duplicative process of twinning and focus on two that appear to be exactly alike. Arbus was so intrigued by the idea of multiples that she heard of a multiples party happening and invited herself.

Nobody is quite sure how Arbus heard about the gathering, but a few parents obliged when she asked their children to pose, which is how the Wade sisters wound up on a sidewalk, standing close enough to seem joined at the shoulder, their expression a kind of spectral blank.

The father of the Wade twins was surprised by the way Arbus captured his twin girls, saying she made them look ghostly. In their collection of family photos, the sisters look nothing like the way they were captured by Arbus. During the party Arbus took over 300 photographs, 50 of which she actually printed; none were as popular as the Wade sisters [Fig. 1]. Arbus liked to focus on odd people, even referring to them as freaks. She was both fascinated and repelled by twins and replication.

Harvey Stein, a contemporary photographer, also photographed twins, and over a period of six years, he interviewed 150 pairs. Stein’s interest in twins began in grade

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school. He recalled a pair of twin girls who attended his school and how he was unsure about what to think of them because they looked so alike. Unlike Arbus, Stein chose to focus on the differences between sets of twins rather than their similarities. Because photographs can be studied without the original subject present, a viewer has time to pick out the differences between the twins, which is what Stein wished to highlight through his work. Stein attempted to break the perception of exact replicas by allowing photography to draw attention to their differences [Fig. 2]. As part of Stein’s fascination with picking out the differences, he published a book, Parallels: A Look at Twins, showcasing the images he took of twin pairs once he interviewed them and allowing the public to notice the differences between them.

TWIN COLLABORATIONS

Twins who become artists themselves often collaborate playing off each others strengths and trusting one another to stay true to their agreed vision. The pairs of twins who work together to create art have grown up together and have therefore been exposed to the same environment. Environment and life experience show through the work of most artists; and even with twins, each is likely to have a different view on the world.

The Starn twins, Doug and Mike, have excelled in collaborative photography. “They’re so immersed in we-ness, so conjoined in their thinking, that they will not, cannot tell you what they singly contribute to their shared works of art.”17 Even as art students they often worked on each others homework, and couldn’t help but collaborate.

A few themes are central to the Starns’ work; one which is noticeable and not surprising

is that of twinship. Often their photographs have a duplicative quality. “Many of the photographs of Doug and Mike Starn feature multiple images, which seems appropriate, since they are a multiple image themselves.”\footnote{Christine Temin. “Boston's Starn Twins an art-world Sensation”, \textit{Boston Globe}, May 10, 1987, A4.} The approach of using multiple images to create a whole relates back to the multiplicity of twinship. It is fitting that this process of collaboration begins with the hands and eyes of a set of twins [Fig. 3]. Although one twin is married, the two still identify as a unit and think together. Since the 1980s, when they were discovered as “The Starn Twins”- and often referred to as such- they have become slightly more independent, and now wish to be called by their given names, Mike and Doug. And yet they still finish each others sentences and are best friends, so close that some other twins give them a hard time about it. This balancing act of selves as individuals and their uniqueness as a pair comes naturally to them.

Like the Starn twins, the Phelps brothers are also twins who collaborate as artists. Kyle and Kelly are identical twins who grew up together, influenced by their parents; their dad was a carpenter, their mom was an upholsterer. They always had odd materials to play with, something most children would have been steered clear of: wood, sheet metal, dry wall and concrete. Together they became passionate about making things and both decided to pursue the arts. “We collaborate on each other’s projects, although we can function alone when we have to, Kelly said. According to Kyle, I work on his, he works on mine- it becomes ‘ours’ and I think it makes our work stronger, kind of like right and left hands.”\footnote{Pamela Dillon. Z7-1.} Fiberglass, clay and resin, used to duplicate missing furniture pieces, have played important roles in their work, along with other materials. Because they grew up in New Castle, Indiana, they witnessed blue collar living. At the time, Firestone and
Chrysler were big companies in the area, and they themselves did factory work during the summers when they were in college. Their work plays on blue collar living and the results of mass lay-offs. One of their exhibitions, Class, Race and the Blue Collar, points to social conditions that inspire the brothers in creating their work together. Both men have degrees, are college professors, and continue to collaborate, even in the classroom, often teaching classes together. The powerful bond between identical twins creates a mysterious symbiosis that becomes second nature.

British twin artists Jane and Louise Wilson decided to continue collaborating even after they went to separate art colleges. In the end, they exhibited the same body of work at two locations for their undergraduate degrees. Together they were accepted to graduate school at Goldsmith’s College of Art in London. Much of their work combines photography, video and installation components. They often appear in their installations, although abstracted, and call them interventions [Fig. 4]. These interventions are how they build or react to the space.

The impact of these interventions is both gently humorous and profoundly affecting: humorous in the way they puncture the solemnity or the too telling drama of their chosen sites; affecting in how the artists themselves, the protagonists and instigators of the work, adopt the role of participants every bit as put out and put upon as the locations themselves.20

Like the Starn and Phelps brothers, the Wilsons’ often share the work, going back and forth on the concepts, imagery and set-up needed. Photography critic Greg Hilty writes about the Wilsons:

Their collaboration is a pragmatic and effective one, remarkable only for its lack of pretension or airs. There is no sustained division of labor, no precedence, no false modesty. They can still surprise each other with individual comments about the work, but do not allow contradiction to settle

in. Both artists commonly, in the presence of the other, refer naturally to “my work” and what “I” want to achieve with it, rather than failing into the often affected partnership language of the married couple/collaborative duo.²¹

Unlike the Starn and Phelps twins, the Wilsons work together yet maintain individual identity when speaking about their work.

Gert and Uwe Tobias, born in Romania, work together making mixed-media imagery. “Their is a hybrid art that mixes the old but complex technology of woodcut printing with painting, typography, and the creation of image-poems.”²² They grew up in Romania as well as Germany, where they moved in 1985. They work together, often referencing the different cultures they were a part of, including ‘the Impaler’, defender of Romania, as well as Dracula. “Gert and Uwe Tobias make art that looks as if it has evolved from the kind of private language twins occasionally develop, from mutual shared obsessions, with its repetitive motifs”²³ [Fig. 5]. The repetition in their work is a visual clue that they are closely linked and influenced by their own twin culture. Speaking to one another through their work shows that their relationship and their need to collaborate is like gravity pulling them together.

Looking directly at a set of twins that create art using paper, print and book arts leads us to Meda and Veda Rives. This pair created a large scale paper installation, titled Dual Pathway. Together they wanted to create something that dealt with nature and was suspended so that the viewer would have to look up into it [Fig. 6]. This piece is made of connected panels of handmade paper that spiral into the center. Most of their

²¹ Ibid.
²³ Ibid.
collaborative work is large-scale paper that can be viewed as sculptural book forms. When the twins are not working jointly, they both pursue different forms of printmaking: one prefers monotypes while the other leans toward collage. Because of the mutual interests and projects they take on together, they founded Mirror Image Press.

Identical twins make fascinating subjects in art because genetic copies are such a rare occurrence. Artists have played on twins’ similarities and the strangeness of biological duplication, but some have also stopped to look deeper. You can see that patterns, reflections or the processes of duplication in their work are strong. When experiencing art made by twins, one also becomes aware of their shared environment as it rings true in what they make. Identical twins are so in tune with one another that their work can often appear to be made or created by one person. The execution of each piece does not appear to be made with different hands.
CHAPTER 4: DUPLICATION IN PRINT, PAPER AND BOOK

MATERIALS AND STUDIO WORK

Making multiples of paper, prints and books in small editions allows for each replicated artwork to look and act as another’s twin. Yet, when really inspecting each piece, small variables can be detected. This duplicative process has its advantages in that many copies are produced, reaching a wider audience. However, just as twins are not exactly alike, each piece of art will not be exactly the same. Each piece of paper, print or book will have some difference, due to variables in its environment and creation. As with biological twinship, circumstances cause variation beginning at the moment of creation. In papermaking, each sheet of paper will be pulled from the same slurry; however, after every sheet a papermaker does not charge the vat with more pulp. This can cause each sheet to vary slightly in thickness, tone or color. Similar circumstances occur in printmaking. In letterpress printing, each image is printed from the same type or linoleum block, but if a printer does not maintain a consistent amount of ink on the rollers, images will print irregularly. Books can be bound with the same materials, yet some may be sewn a little more tightly, causing the thickness of a text block to vary. Any duplicative process has room for slight differences, especially when made with the human hand.

Making book objects allows individuals to collaborate even more than in other art forms, as painters usually don’t allow others to paint on their canvas and sculptors don’t let others alter their work. Book arts encourages writers, image makers, paper makers and book binders to work together toward the same end product. The process of collaborating allows people to play on each other’s strengths, and affords an opportunity for like minded
individuals to come together for an artistic goal or purpose. Twins making books can provide their personal creative perspective into the project both as a pair and individually. This potentially allows each individual in the genetic duo to offer their creative strengths and to combine them with one another. Identical twins are born with the exact same genetic make-up and that offers a unique opportunity for the pair to be like-minded. Twins creating art must trust their co-twin and know that their shared work is in good hands. One twin may be a writer, while the other uses a more hands-on, visual approach: fusing the two within a book project can work well. Collaborations are more successful when they occur between people who have trust in one another’s abilities.
CONCLUSION

The research suggests, scientifically and artistically, that identical twins have a connection that is unique in comparison to other relationships. This connection is attributed to a strong genetic match, even taking into consideration the variation that occurs the moment one becomes two. Some artists use twins as their subject in an attempt to defy time and allow the audience to submerge themselves in the differences or similarities between the subjects. Looking at scientific research on twins and their innate likeness, as well as sets of identical twins who understand their own symbiosis, one can see how twins collaborate together naturally. It is evident that fusing the artistry of identical twins is far from artificially forced or contrived, it is an organic occurrence. This genetic duo that started as one often seems to continue as one, a whole made of two parts. A single thought or idea that manifests itself by two individuals is commonplace to them.

Because I have lived my whole life as a twin, I have tried to view twins from a non-twin perspective. As a twin myself, I chose to create work about twins with the concept of variation, duplication and identity. Two of my pieces are collaborations because I am naturally drawn to working in pairs. I chose to work with my twin, with whom I have complete trust and confidence, as well as a close friend with whom I have worked well in the past. I trusted my collaborative partners’ abilities to get a message across that I found difficult to put into words. I asked them to make work with me often, as I myself feel more comfortable within a pair. Working with my sister comes naturally as she and I have always been side by side in life. In the past we worked together to create art, usually as gifts for friends and family. Most of what we did was collage work, almost always broken down into one-inch squares. My role in the collages would be to draw the image in the
grid and together we would color the squares with different mediums. Thinking back to those times, I recognize that we both worked the same way, in an environment with music playing or the TV on as background noise, neither speaking to the other. Even as adults we have made quilts together, continuing our grid-like pattern. My sister taught me how to use a sewing machine, which I now use to sew paper in some of my work.

When reviewing the science of identical twins and the creative output of twin artists and artists who are fascinated by twins, one can see the perception of identity and the complexity of the genetic duo is evident. The genetically identical duo is something I am a part of: I am less “one” and more “one half” of two. I understand the importance of my other half. This research has caused me to examine my life as a twin and conclude that I could not imagine my life without my twin. I myself am fascinated by the mystery of twins and at times am captivated by each having two separate identities, the half and the whole. Having found many sets of twins that make art together helps me understand why I too am drawn to create with my sister. I understand that she is an individual and therefore realize why our search for individual identity has been awkward at times.

Over the years we have grown and now recognize the importance of the unit and the individual; this attempt to de-code twin culture will continue to fascinate. As technology advances, there are more and more triplets, quadruplets and quintuplets, but finding an identical set may prove to be difficult which is why identical twins will continue to retain their power to intrigue.
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