Sharing the World: an approach for sustainable architectural design

Andrea Wheeler
Iowa State University, andrea1@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf
Part of the Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation
https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf/106

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Sharing the World: an approach for sustainable architectural design

Abstract
What else could be more appropriate for a conversation about sustainable architecture, than the proposition in Luce Irigaray’s Sharing the World that it is the task of the human being, to learn not to appropriate resources but to share life, with each other and with plants? The question of sustainable architecture is, however, dominated by a discourse comparing the energy performances of buildings and on abstract certification or “rating tools”, each easily manipulated to serve the purposes of either commercial or political gain. Despite a rich history of architects challenging relationships with nature and re-envisioning community, and social scientists addressing how societies use or conserve energy, this current trend presents the problems of sustainable architecture as distinct from that of the human being, his and her desires.

Disciplines
Architecture

Comments
This is an invited spoken text contribution to the round table at the seminar Sharing the World with Luce Irigaray, Michael Marder and Judith Still, Wills Memorial Building, Reception Room, University of Bristol, United Kingdom, 30th October 2014.

This conference proceeding is available at Iowa State University Digital Repository: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_conf/106
“Sharing the World: an approach for sustainable architectural design” invited spoken text contribution to the round table at the seminar Sharing the World with Luce Irigaray, Michael Marder and Judith Still, Wills Memorial Building, Reception Room, University of Bristol, United Kingdom, 30th October 2014

Andrea Wheeler,

Assistant Professor of Architecture, Iowa State University

What else could be more appropriate for a conversation about sustainable architecture, than the proposition in Luce Irigaray’s Sharing the World that it is the task of the human being, to learn not to appropriate resources but to share life, with each other and with plants? The question of sustainable architecture is, however, dominated by a discourse comparing the energy performances of buildings and on abstract certification or “rating tools”, each easily manipulated to serve the purposes of either commercial or political gain. Despite a rich history of architects challenging relationships with nature and re-envisioning community, and social scientists addressing how societies use or conserve energy, this current trend presents the problems of sustainable architecture as distinct from that of the human being, his and her desires.

But how do we resist taking part in an exploitation of the earth’s resources; and how can we change a mode of relationality long enabled and fostered by society; one based on an uncultivated need rather than a cultivated desire? Luce Irigaray argues that we cannot share the world and its resources until we properly conceive our relationship with the world. This philosophy of sharing suggests a simultaneously ethical and political task to be accomplished together. It is not about a relationship with nature, place or dwelling, or a return to conversations with philosophy that have been adopted by many architects in the past. This is relationality reconsidered between autonomous living, breathing and sexed human beings, and hence the beginning of a different relationship of place and a different relationship in community: indeed, the beginnings of a different democracy and different economy. This relationship with a sexuate other provides the inspiration for a renewed dialogue on sustainable architecture. This is a work
motived by love: work taking place in relation; architecture incited by radical collaboration. From this perspective *Sharing the World* presents a perfect text for the sustainable architect.

But sharing the world, this new philosophy, critically challenges the possibility of achieving these aims without the cultivation of sexuate difference and this task, Luce Irigaray argues, ‘Western culture has not cared about with the seriousness it deserves’ (p. xix)

If we are to adopt the philosophy of sharing the world for sustainable architecture, this would do away with the need to bring under control the living and sensible world and to measure the success of architectural intentions. Architecture becomes refuge for another way of being in the world, a place for a world different to ours, from inside out tradition (p. 133). It means changing the way we are at home, the way we find refuge, the way we dwell. It is a profoundly different architectural impulse to any offered in the field of sustainable design.

This is the art that is necessary for sharing the world, it means as Luce Irigaray writes: ‘To be both artist and the work of art in relating to the other, beginning with the one who is sexuatly different from us’ (p. 135). Architecture’s cultural role becomes the work of sharing the world.