

10-30-2014

Sharing the World: an approach for sustainable architectural design

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Recommended Citation

Wheeler, Andrea, "Sharing the World: an approach for sustainable architectural design" (2014). *Architecture Conference Proceedings and Presentations*. 106.

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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.

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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

motivated 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 sexual 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 sexually different from us' (p. 135). Architecture's cultural role becomes the work of sharing the world.