

# *Being-two in an Architectural Perspective*

## **Conversation between Luce Irigaray and Andrea Wheeler**

Andrea Wheeler: I attended the talk of Luce Irigaray at the International Architectural Association in London in November 2000, 'How can we live together in a lasting way?' Luce Irigaray then set out, to a very large and attentive audience, how architects could care about relations between people, and particularly about love, through building. She explained that architects do not take into consideration sufficiently the question of 'the closeness with the other', above all an other who is different, in the home. And she explained how this problem is crucial for us being able to live together. One of her most innovative proposals was to rebuild the home, starting with two small one-room apartments, which would replace the conventional shared dining-room, lounge and bedroom in order to make room for what is one's own world and for closeness with the other, for the individual's singularity as well as for the foundation or re-foundation of a community, beginning with that of the couple or the family. She developed the idea of how each one-room apartment could be arranged according to the singularity of each person, especially that of a man and of a woman. This published talk (in Luce Irigaray, Key Writings, 2004) contains really stimulating ideas for creation in dwelling and in building.

As a young architect myself, with an interest in how the concept of love relates to architecture, I want to draw the attention of architects to the importance of the work of Luce Irigaray for inspiring a new way of building and arranging a home. Of course, the texts of Luce Irigaray are already known in the architectural world, but not sufficiently, in my opinion, above all in relation to her specific proposals and reflections on dwelling as such. These reflections are in part linked to the lecture by Heidegger ('Building Dwelling Thinking', in Poetry, Language, Thought), a lecture that Luce Irigaray continues, having in mind a philosophy of two subjects and the manner of being two and dwelling in two. The purpose of this dialogue with Luce Irigaray is thus to build bridges between her and architects, and also to indicate some solutions to the Institution which, today, is worrying about the presence of women in the architectural profession. For example, the Royal Institute of British Architects (*RIBA*) has recently made changes to their policy to include the statement:

The *RIBA* values the creative potential which individuals from diverse backgrounds, and with differing skills and abilities, bring to the Institute and the architectural profession. We will endeavour to foster an environment that is free from harassment or unfair discrimination, where human potential can be cultivated and in which the human rights of all individuals are respected. (*RIBA* 2001)

To achieve this, the Institute states it is committed to fostering an environment of mutual respect in working relationships, to increasing awareness of equal opportunity policy, and to identifying means to achieve diversity in education and the profession. The need to define such policy reflects social pressures on the Institution; however, whilst proposing to cultivate human potential and valuing creative potential, the reality of women's experience within the profession remains the same. Moreover, recent statistical data, collected by the *RIBA*, demonstrates that, rather than reflecting a general trend of increasing parity in the numbers of men and women working within comparative professions, the numbers of women graduates who remain within the architectural profession has decreased sharply, even in current favourable economic conditions. Identifying this trend, the *RIBA* equality forum, 'Architects for change', commissioned an urgent study attempting to determine why women fail to qualify as architects or sustain work as architects, with the intention of identifying means to achieve greater diversity within the profession. They write:

Over the past 10 years the percentage of women studying architecture has risen from 27 % to 37% of the total architecture student population. During this period drop out rates of women students during the Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 stages of the course have also steadily reduced, so that they are now at an equal level with their male counterparts. However, once they qualify, the percentage of women falls from being around 37 % of the student population to only 14 % of the architectural profession. This compares poorly with law and medicine where women now make up almost half of the active profession. (*RIBA* 2002b)

The group has now tried to investigate why women, who have qualified as architects, are not going on to work actively in practice and to establish at what stage and why they choose to leave. Outcomes of the study, seen as acting to counter this trend, are suggested recommendations endorsing human resources policies that work towards diversity within the work place. They write:

The results will inform any future statements and action on the *RIBA*'s equal opportunities policy. The ultimate objective is to further endorse the business case demonstrating the HR benefit of diversity, where equal opportunities are fully integrated within established employment initiatives designed to maximize staff potential and increase creativity. The *RIBA* is particularly interested in recommendations that offer practical help to our members in managing the diversity agenda within the work place. (*RIBA* 2002a)

Encouraging diversity or campaigning for equality are only partial solutions to cultivating human potential. Encouraging diversity through policy aimed towards Human Resources managers does not address how to foster an environment which sustains the value of diversity or difference. Whilst asking women architects to consider how to conceive better working conditions has some value for the problem, the question of sustaining diversity exceeds the issue of equal opportunity within the work place. In this respect, Luce Irigaray has been involved in many projects and with many women's groups responding to very similar problems.

*ANDREA WHEELER: What do you think of the notion of 'diversity' with respect to 'difference', in particular difference between women and men – a key word in your thought?*

LUCE IRIGARY: To promote only diversity, as it is often the case in our times, runs the risk of remaining in an unchanged horizon with regard to the relations with the other(s). We then entrust this problem to customs, moral rules or religious feeling without questioning our culture about its capability of meeting with the other as such. Furthermore, we are unable to open ourselves all the time to others different from us. We need to return to ourselves, to keep and save our totality or integrity, and this is possible only in sexual difference. Why? Because it is the most basic difference, this one which secures for each one bridge(s) both between nature and culture and between us. It is starting from this difference that the other sorts of otherness have been elaborated. And if someone would raise here the problem of races or generations, it could be answered that races and generations do not prevent sexual attraction and that the behaviours with respect to them result from an elaboration, or non elaboration, of sexual attraction. This attraction is stronger than the difference between the

bodies. And it is more spiritual in a way. It also arises firstly between two. It is more initial and fundamental than diversity and can explain it, while the contrary is not true. Diversity is a means today to escape the question of sexual difference and to reduce or merge women's liberation in a past world in which woman had not yet discovered and affirmed her own cultural values.

*A. W.: My own work, like the research proposed by 'Architects for change', has aimed to determine how the profession can respond to and sustain difference. In the terminology of the RIBA statement: it has sought to investigate how architecture can cultivate human potential in a space free of harassment or unfair discrimination in which the human rights of all individuals are respected. However, my approach, unlike the work anticipated by 'Architects for change', has sought to investigate this issue through contemporary philosophy, in particular your own work and I have posed the question of women and architecture as an investigation of 'love'.*

*I have argued that valuing the creative potential which individuals from diverse backgrounds contribute to architecture has to explore the conflict between expectations imposed and the wealth of women's creative possibilities. Reading your work, I have come to understand the question of sustaining diversity, or more crudely of women and architecture, as one of how to live, that is as a philosophical and architectural question which also profoundly describes what is at stake for women in the architectural work place. Furthermore, I understand the question of how to live in your work as life in respect and cultivation of the other's 'love' or more concisely, perhaps, that of rethinking dwelling. The work of the architect, in this context, becomes one of cultivating the other's existence, or in both architectural and philosophical terms, their dwelling; albeit dwelling profoundly reconsidered. For example, you write: Currently there is a kind of one built on a division of labour, of goods, of discourse, a one which is merely an enslaving complementarity: yet, love cannot but be free. [...] If the one of love is ever to be achieved, we have to discover the two (in An Ethics of Sexual Difference, p. 66-67).*

*How do you relate 'life', 'love', 'dwelling' and the question of the other(s)?*

L. I.: Living is originary being in relation(s), particularly with the other. We always fail to this being-in-relation because we confuse this with dwelling in a same world, with sharing a common world. But this does not take into consideration the possible diversity of the worlds and, first of all, the difference between the world of a man and that of a woman, their different

ways of dwelling. Our culture belonging above all to a masculine world, to subject women to such a culture is to conceal their subjectivity and thus destroy a possible being in relation(s) between men and women. Of course, they can partly compose an undifferentiated universe, a universe of ‘somebodies’ where relations do not really exist between each people. These relations are supposed to be mediatized by the same world: the same things, the same language, the same values, the same home. However, this ‘same world’ does not exist without destroying the specific world in which each one lives. It is difficult to realize that we inhabit different worlds while apparently we share a common quotidian reality. But considering only this dimension, we already are forgetting the level of a being-in-relation(s) with respect for difference(s) – that is to say, a being-in-relation with the other as such. In order to leave a culture in which being with the other(s) only means to take part in the same world, we have to overcome an undifferentiated relation with respect to the other(s). ‘Undifferentiated’ here can be endowed at least with a double signification: without difference and indifferent, that is to say both unimportant and awakening no feeling, perhaps not even any specific mood. The other is then confused with a general mood towards the world, the world to which I belong and that I feel as mine. In order to meet with the other as such, we have to reverse the situation: to leave our usual quotidian in order to open ourselves to the strange, the still unknown, the unusual and unfamiliar. We have to give the precedence to the other and not to our usual world. This way of thinking and building could be more fitting for women, in particular architects. The discourse of girls and female adults bear witness to that. And I cannot agree with the fact that this could result only from a feminine alienation as I have sometimes heard. But, of course, this priority given to the relation to and with the other – and not the others as an undifferentiated people – needs to be thought and cultivated: it cannot remain at the level of a simple mood or feeling.

*A.W.: Thinking dwelling as love in architecture also has some personal motive for me, foreseeing the call for research by ‘Architects for change’, and trying to understand difficulties I have had of being a woman and an architect. Within the Institution through social convention, women, and men, can feel obliged to adopt masculine modes of identity conceived as authoritarian. Women, in particular, are continuously asked to accommodate themselves to contradictory male expectations. Conforming to unspoken and unwritten conventions can place women in untenable positions; but attempting to interpret the difficulties faced within the Institution – especially when the effects of patriarchy can be concealed and invidious – can also lead to conflict, albeit a conflict that reveals the tension*

*between recognizing the cultural construction of identity and the need to find one's own path. Thinking love is a way of understanding my own personal desire to live, create or build in my own way outside the horizons of family expectations; which includes a wider social family and the models of femininity it presents. As you write in your paper 'How can we live together in a lasting way?':*

Intimacy, familiarity, and proximity do not exist only through living alongside one another and sharing the same space. On the contrary, that often leads to their destruction. The intimate and the familiar are first confused with being in the mother, being with the mother, and dwelling in the family home. But this perception of proximity is then mixed with, or even reduced to an infantile need for undifferentiation, whereby that which seems close belongs to the parental or genealogical universe, sheltering a child's birth and becoming. [...] In order to conquer and affirm her or his particular being and becoming, the subject must renounce this initial experience of the familiar (Key Writings, p. 132-133).

*One of the more beneficial ways to address problems of women within the architectural institution, you suggest, has to be criticism directed towards society and socio-economic factors, including their predetermining myths, with the creation of positive alternative fictions, myths or 'love stories'. I have found some of your re-evaluations, in particular that of Aphrodite and her love rethought, as influential. Aphrodite, in my opinion, describes a mode of being for the woman architect, who cultivates being-two.*

*Could you say a little more here about your thinking and path towards 'love'?*

L. I.: My first step on the path of my liberation as woman was criticism. I had to leave a culture of a single subject in which thinking, loving and even living were not possible for me. My first books – Speculum and This Sex Which Is Not One, for example – testify to this attempt to go out of the prison of a tradition in which I had to conform to models which were not suitable for me as woman. But to remain in criticism was no more appropriate to my desire of living, loving and thinking. Criticism ought to remain a scientific attitude and not a basic and exclusive behaviour. I knew that my way of loving and thinking was mistaken and had thus to discover how to live, love and think after leaving a monosexuate culture. The unfolding of my work bears witness to this quest. I sought new mediations to differ from the so-called neutral culture in which I was merged – be they genealogy, language, law, religion,

etc. These mediations were a means of differentiating myself without remaining only in a critical attitude. They represented a positive means of going along my own path. Next I tried, and still now am trying, to discover or create mediations between paths which are different. I understood that, to reach this, I had to start from sexual difference, that is to say from the most basic and universal difference, a difference founded both in nature and in culture and which crosses all history(ies), tradition(s) and people(s). To work on this difference represents a difficult task, a task that cannot remain only mental, as our culture has taught us, but which requires a participation of the whole of ourselves, a sort of conversion of ourselves.

Throughout this journey, I wanted and needed to continue to love in order to remain alive, creative by myself and happy, even if the path was very difficult.

*A. W.: Your approach to dwelling differs considerably from other contemporary philosophers, in particular Heidegger who is more familiar amongst architects. However, whilst Heidegger does not gender his mode of existence, in The Age of the Breath you suggest that women's task is not, firstly, to make a world – which is more associated with a male and also perhaps an architectural behaviour – but to cultivate an autonomous being, an interiority, even in being-two. The feminine is not called to carry out the task of constructing a world, which is similar to man's. You explain that: 'To become a world herself, to cultivate herself without violence or power over what surrounds her – all of these correspond more to the feminine to be (To Be Two, p. 72).*

*In addition, the cultivation of the 'to be' of woman may also be capable of redirecting man to his own 'to be'. In this respect, being-two in architecture could differentiate the role and function of the architect. And that could favour an autonomous existence for women. For example, you write in 'How can we live together in a lasting way?':*

Living an existence of one's own requires an awareness of one's own specific world, whose contents and limits must be recognized and affirmed. Only beyond these contents and limits can the other be encountered, desired and loved, provided that his or her own world is respected, and without infringing its frontiers. Proximity can be created because of the limits with which each one, the masculine or the feminine subject, surrounds their own particular universe. It constitutes a third place beyond the maintaining of each one's own world, a place that belongs to no one but to the two [...] This place remains always open – which does not mean simply empty – for a possible welcoming of the other [...] (in Key Writings, p. 133).

*How could you link the work of constructing outside oneself – as it is often the case for a man – and the work of becoming a world oneself, of building oneself?*

L. I.: Generally to build is understood as building something with material(s) to which it is given form(s). These views on building are rather masculine. From the beginning of our Western culture, man has tried to differ from nature by mastering this, which provides raw material, with his technique and technology. Building, then, implies to cut oneself off from nature, including human nature, especially represented as mother but even as woman. Building is seldom understood as building oneself with respect for the nature that we are. This way of building, nevertheless, is in some way asked of woman, notably in engendering and loving. To engender and to assure motherhood require a culture of oneself as nature, and it is also true in order to awake and sustain sexual desire. This way of building herself as nature is not sufficient because it is in the greatest part imposed on the woman by an other. To reach building herself, woman has to preserve and cultivate her nature also in an autonomous and decided manner. She has to discover how to pass from her material or bodily nature to a cultural or spiritual nature appropriate to her. That is to say that she has to discover how to live, to love, to speak, to think in accordance with her nature. Building a home must entail a concern for raw or transformed material through projects, technique and technology. But could an architect build houses for others if he, or she, is not capable of building their self? Unfortunately this dimension, the most important dimension in building, is often neglected, and even forgotten. Again today I listened to an interview with architects, and the novelty that they proposed was to manage a space for the car in the flat itself. They were very serious, discussing how much this novelty could improve the life of people. I said to myself that probably their project would be successful because it takes place in a system in which we already are. In this system, few architects wonder about the necessary relation between building a house and building oneself, at least at the level of being and not only having, possessing. If it was the case, the question of how to live together, how to dwell in two, would awake their attention more than how to welcome the car into the flat.

*A. W.: 'How can we live together in a lasting way', as already cited, suggests that the architect and architecture is in a privileged position to provide a means of sustaining this mode of existence. It also suggests that architecture should reconsider the issue of existence or dwelling in order to correspond to the reality of two (sexes). You say:*

The issue of dwelling presents us with complex problems, which an architect should take into consideration. It is one of enabling the human subject to subsist, to exist and to be, to become – while most often being two, or more than two. Yet those who design dwellings are primarily concerned with subsistence: shelter, recuperation through eating and sleeping, provision of basic hygiene (in Key Writings, p. 123).

*Identifying dwelling as an issue that the architect should reconsider, whilst it corresponds to Heidegger's arguments in 'Building dwelling thinking' also 'implies a need to think about possible ways of coexisting within the same residence without destroying the respective subjectivities' (op. cit., p. 124). However, living to be two has as yet evaded architectural discourse, but recent theorists have sought to take up your work to suggest its value for contemporary theory. Some women and men may be willfully blind to the problems you want to consider, while a number of women architects, who have an interest in your philosophy, have also begun to suggest that your work offers an important challenge to contemporary architectural theory. Responding to this interest in being-two by theorists, to this desire for a discourse, must also be one aspect of an ethical practice approaching being-two.*

*How and if I can discover or rediscover feminine values in architecture, perhaps more simply, the question of how to live, or love,, has occupied many years of my architectural education. Initially my interest in your philosophy was motivated by Elizabeth Grosz's introductions to your work, in particular her paper 'Women, chora, dwelling' (in Architecture and the Feminine, pp. 22-27) and the paper that she cites 'Où et comment habiter?' (in Cahiers du Grif, pp. 139-143). Grosz's paper has also motivated a number of other women architects to discuss your work in terms of un lieu propre, a space of one's own. You have suggested that the need for 'a space of one's own' should not merely evoke the request Virginia Woolf made in her time for a 'room of her own' but rather a criticism of conventional understandings of 'space' within patriarchal traditions, with a call for a heart of one's own, a soul of one's own, a form of interiority (in Le partage de la parole, p. 46-47). This space is necessary, in your opinion, because: '[...]there is no doubt that competitiveness and fighting will undermine the communal life. Besides, if so-called communal life is forced upon us and not truly shared, is it any wonder people seek love affairs outside the home?' ('How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?', in Key Writings, p. 127).*

*In the recent publication Le Partage de la parole you also write that being-two expresses the need to construct a relationship with the other as belonging to a different world. In fact,*

*the world would not be one but at least two – two worlds corresponding to the two sexes or genders with their own languages. Thus, similarly critical of theorists who have described your method in terms of mimicry, the poetic – poietic – of being-two, you suggest, is in part, as yet, outside language and as such has to be cultivated. In this respect, nature plays an important role in sustaining difference. This difference, you insist, is not simply biological or social, but a question of difference in relational identity. Moreover, you write:*

Maintaining the diversity of worlds enables and obliges one's return to oneself, but also allows her or him to become familiar with the world of the other, not only at the level of words and ideas but also through everyday perception. ('How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?', in Key Writings, p.130).

*Could you say a little more about the problem of the 'different worlds'? In my opinion it is very crucial to your work but it is also difficult to understand because it is new thought.*

L. I.: Most of the time, we think of our relations with the other(s) inside a single and same world. We now discover that it is not as simple as we thought, for example through the difficulty of coexistence between peoples, cultures. Even then many consider that the solution to diversity is to integrate the other(s) – the foreigner(s) – in their own country. This could be democratically possible only thanks to the definition of a new legislation which would take into consideration the persons as such and not only the properties or the goods, be they material or spiritual. In this case coexistence becomes possible, and integration useless. But we are still at the level of a very minimum, a level indispensable but not sufficient. We have not yet resolved the problem of the difference of subjectivities due to the culture. Architects could care about that by allowing different cultures or worlds to be respected inside the house, the flat. Perhaps through the question of multiculturalism, many people, including architects, could understand the necessity of worrying about difference when dwelling or building houses or flats. But the question, there, above all concerns diversity – that is to say, a multiple of the one: humanity as man or neuter individual. It is more difficult to make clear that difference exists, first of all and in a universal way, between man and woman, men and women. Of course they partly inhabit a same world, be it nature or a historically constructed world. But if there exists an objectivity of the world which surrounds them, they subjectively live it in another way. First, there are men who generally have built the world, a world appropriate to them, and through which they ruled over nature itself, hence men and women

cannot dwell in it in the same way. Second, as analysis of language clearly shows, the relational identities of men and women are not the same. They differently live and express the relation to themselves, to the other(s), to the world. They thus dwell in different worlds, even if certain aspects of these worlds seem, and sometimes are, objectively alike. All of us, and particularly architects, have to take into account the difference between the worlds in which each dwells, and have both to allow their existence and becoming and to care about the coexistence with the other, in respect for difference(s).

*A..W.: The fundamental opposition between nature and culture is rethought in being-two, so that the female subject does not constitute herself in opposition to nature but by means of nature:*

Nature represents to some extent the special and preferred instrument of female becoming, an instrument which merges with the self and is not external to the self as it often is for the male. [...] It is a question of coming to terms with nature in a fashion which is not domination but measure, rhythm, harmony, growth, fecundity (Translation by Andrea Wheeler of 'Une identité relationnelle différente', in Le Partage de la parole, p. 46).

*In addition: 'Nature has a sex, always and everywhere. All traditions that remain faithful to the cosmic order have a sex and take account of natural powers (*puissances*) in sexual terms. They are also regulated by *alternations* that do not truly contradict each other' (Sexes and Genealogies, p. 108).*

*For Heidegger, conceptions of nature correspond philosophically with the question of being and Being; but being-two approaches the question of being and Being differently, taking into account the dimension of the sexual, or better *sexuate*, difference. How could you take this into consideration when building a space to live?*

L. I.: As I wrote in the text 'How can we live together in a lasting way?', it is important to assure in the house a presence of nature. It preserves the relation with a living universal, a universal that can be shared by all people and that provides a bridge between them, in particular between woman and man. This presence of nature in the home can be experienced by each one according to one's own identity and thus favours a relation with respect for

difference(s). Such a presence can also be a help, for each one and between the two, to pass from body to soul, to love, to words, notably thanks to an elaboration of air through breathing. Then, each can keep their own economy, and thus coexistence is possible in difference(s). Nature offers a mediation that a constructed or fabricated world does no longer provide – a mediation inside each self, a mediation between the two, and also a mediation between the house and the universe as cosmos. This mediation constitutes the basis for a relation amongst all people, not only the neighbourhood and people of the same country or culture but people of a global society. It would be possible here to evoke the fourfold of Heidegger. But it already represents a construction in relation to the four elements of the universe, to which the return seems necessary as such, in order to elaborate a being-two in the respect for difference between masculine and feminine subjectivities, notably in the way of relating with nature itself.

*A. W.: You have criticized architects for not thinking difference in a fitting way. Moreover, you suggest that the traditional representation of difference forces those who live within it into immobilizing stereotypes that prevent them from existing, becoming and meeting with the other. The play of stereotypes certainly does not allow an environment free of unfair discrimination or where human potential can be cultivated. As an alternative you suggest:*

The horizontal transcendence between the sexes creates space, spaces, whereas reducing it to a genealogy destroys them or at least fills them up. Of course spaces opened up by difference cannot figure directly in a home because they cannot be represented. However, they can be evoked and raised by maintaining and reawakening difference in the way of dwelling ('How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?', in Key Writings, p. 132).

*Being-two is another approach to difference than that thought through the work of Derrida who has been a popular philosopher amongst architects.*

*What do you think about the stereotypes related to sexual difference? How could we pass from them to your thought of sexual, or rather sexuante, difference?*

L. I.: When we speak about stereotypes, notably those related to sexual, or sexuante, difference, it is often as if they are imposed on us only from the outside by a society or a culture. Of course this is partly the case, but it does not explain when and how stereotypes

were born. When I carried out the work with children on education towards a citizenship respectful of difference(s), I noted that stereotypes arise amongst children themselves. The most fertile time for the root of these stereotypes is when they are ten years old. In my opinion, stereotypes are not only imposed from the outside on the children, they come about all from a lack of education concerning their sexual identity, their sexual difference, their sexual attraction. For example, if this attraction remains uncultivated, it runs the risk of becoming a withdrawal into oneself for each sex which creates stereotypes. These are then shared amongst those who belong to the same gender. They often express an aggressiveness which has connection with an unsatisfied attraction and the frustration resulting from that. To help the children to not fall back in stereotypes requires an education of their own subjectivity and about the means of entering into relations with respect for difference(s). The children really like such an education because it takes into account their real being and their wish for relations between them. Furthermore such a training represents a way of passing from instinct to love, from blind attraction to a desire respectful towards the other. To prevent the birth of stereotypes in education in fact corresponds to a means of reaching a humanity more fulfilled, happy, and capable of a transcendental feeling fruitful in creating, here and now, notably spaces suitable for dwelling.

*A. W.: If dwelling, or being-two, can be thought as a cultivation of the love, exploring being-two in architecture creates the possibility of a place of love, dwelling, hospitality, creativity, notably in communication and talking. This opens ways of thinking about how to cultivate and sustain difference within the work place.*

*I understand your at least two – for example, two lips – as a poetic construction in language, perhaps one of the best known amongst architects, which acts to sustain this new dwelling, ‘where we come to relearn ourselves and each other, in order to become women, and mothers, again and again’ (And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other, p. 67). Your changes to the habits of language with the at least two lips build a threshold to a new mode of being and Being. However, sustaining these modifications in language is a collective project, again of at least two. In And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other, the title suggests both that we do not move together and that it is only together that we can move. This could mean thinking love so as to stir the other up, liberating the two: mother and daughter, another sort of being-two: ‘Making from your gaze an airy substance to inhabit and shelter me from our resemblance’ (op. cit., p. 67). ‘Breath’, ‘perception’ and a ‘sensible transcendental’ ought to sustain being-two, you say. In architecture, the place of the elemental, the place of the hearth*

*are to be rethought. But not only them. Another hearth has to be born from the cultivation of the attraction and desire between two:*

Pornographic representations can arouse sexual desire in a punctual way and, for their effect to become durable, the intensity of the stimulation has to be constantly increased. But even then, instead of maintaining desire, they eradicate it, subjecting it to tools and techniques exterior to the subject.

It is rather through a process of interiorization by each one that the spacing and the space for welcoming the other should be elaborated. Obviously these spaces cannot be reduced to some equivalents of a womb or to some evocations of the vagina, for that would risk lapsing again into complementarity or genealogy, without attaining to create space that opens transcendence between the sexes.

Hereafter, it is the difference itself that will guarantee a passage between earth and sky. The air it provides between her and him is animated by fire and currents, by winds, by desire, with a movement going from one to the other, as well as from the lowest to the highest of the body and the universe, from the most material to that which is most subtle in the micro- and macrocosm.

The centre of a residence is no longer simply the traditional hearth [...] ('How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?', in Key Writings, p. 132).

*How could I use your proposals about 'at least two', 'breath', 'perception' and 'sensible transcendental' in a collective project?*

L. I.: You seem to confuse the two of 'two lips' and the two of 'being-two' as persons. Now the expression 'two lips' tries to express a basic way of self-affection for the feminine subject, while 'being-two' refers to a relation between two subjects. Self-affection is a determining factor in reaching 'being-two' but cannot amount to relation itself. Turning one's attention or one's feeling only to 'the two lips' remains in the perspective of one and alone subject. Of course this subject now is in the feminine but we have not yet reached a culture of two subjects. Often people who speak about 'feminine difference' forget that it does not yet correspond to the difference between two subjects, one masculine and one feminine, being in relation. The meaning of the word 'transcendental' can change according to the two ways of understanding the word 'difference'. A 'sensible transcendental' could exist in the first case, but to remain in a single and proper world prevents us from perceiving the transcendental to

which I refer when speaking of the difference ‘between’ two subjects. This point is important to save and lay-out the space for living together: the space for each one and the space between the two. Woman needs a space where gathering with herself and self-affection are favoured. The ‘two lips’ and, in part, the ‘sensible transcendental’ rather have a share in the space for her, while ‘being-two’ must take into account the two spaces, the passage between them and the world built together. Another point: as said in ‘How can we live together in a lasting way?’, perceptions would be kept alive by the preservation of two different worlds. Which prevents perceptions from falling asleep in the familiarity of a unique world or in a neuter context, a context built without caring about perceptions, all perceptions: visual, but also tactile, auditory, olfactory, gustatory. Architects ought to think about spaces which appeal to all our perceptions – through forms, matter, colour, sounds, odours, etc. – and in a way that is suitable for each self-affection in their own rooms. About a culture of breathing, I have already recalled the need to allow a place for nature in the home, and to save a place of intimacy with oneself, that is to say, for each way of breathing, each breath, including in its relation to the transcendental.

*A.W.: Contemporary feminism in architectural theory, where it proposes itself as a new discourse has, on occasion, undervalued the work of women in architecture who have associated themselves, or have been associated with feminism, proposing a concern for difference in opposition to feminism. Although you do not use the term feminism – that is ‘a word ending with –ism’ – preferring to it the term ‘women’s liberation’, you do suggest that understanding the culturally problematic mother-daughter relationship (rethought for example through the myth of Demeter and Kore, Aphrodite or Hestia) is one of the most difficult for women working within feminist contexts and can contribute to difficulties in sustaining a continued discourse amongst women. In your interviews with women, and also men, in Why Different?, you write that we need to free our mothers with ourselves. Thus, ‘being-two’ addresses not only the question of initiating and sustaining diversity within the work place. ‘Being-two’ addresses a problematic discourse of feminism in architecture, of gender theory and architecture, and of women amongst themselves within the profession.*

*Architecture as a means of being-two thus becomes a reformulation of the question of existence(s), being-in-the-world, being-with-others or dwelling. Moreover, what is significant in thinking dwelling as being-two is that it exceeds contemporary discourses on gender and architecture that your work is more often associated with.*

*You have already largely answered to an undifferentiated perspective in dwelling as being in the world, being with the other(s). In your view, how could this be accomplished in architecture?*

L. I.: Being in relation as two, in a horizontal harmonious way, is the means of emerging from all sorts of undifferentiations: with nature, with mother as origin, with those of the same people. This cannot be imposed on us from an outside but has to be elaborated by ourselves through caring about a relation-in-two respectful for difference(s). Of course the question does not concern a quantitative difference, which somehow remains in sameness and maintains relations in a parental or hierarchical dimension, and even in a sadomasochistic bond. Reciprocity between the two then does not exist, a reciprocity necessary to emerge from undifferentiation, while it is not the same that each can give to the other because of the difference between them. Most of the time, feminists unfortunately have not taken sufficiently into consideration the necessity of differing, from nature but also from oneness, to gain their feminine autonomy. Furthermore many still think of their liberation in terms of becoming similar to men, directly or indirectly, through possessing the same goods, the same rights, the same possibilities in general. It is a new way to return to undifferentiation, an undifferentiation worse than that with nature because it is artificial and without worthwhile resources for the self. Such an undifferentiation constitutes a possible humus or grounding for all kinds of totalitarianisms. Of course the matter is not to oppose a social equality to a traditional hierarchical difference but to understand that reaching a real equality, or rather a real equivalence, of rights for both man and woman, requires us to consider difference between them and not to reduce or assimilate the one to the other. Which would amount to the most radical and irreparable inequality.

*A.W.: In architecture, being-two could thereby be thought in terms of the relationship of woman (or man) and nature, and this could be a concern for architects interested in sustainability or in philosophies of dwelling – as in your poetic prologue of To Be Two. Being-two could be thought in terms of the relationship between man and woman – as in I Love To You, To Be Two and The Way of Love – which should be of interest for architects who care about gender or feminism, albeit this way of thinking feminism has more to do with rethinking democracy. What sort of encounter can initiate an approach to being-two within architecture and how this can be sustained, nevertheless, remains a question for me. In Australia, I presented a paper about an imagined dialogue with Luce Irigaray, before a real*

*dialogue with Luce Irigaray became possible. It was an imagined relationship which sought to question how to cultivate being-two in architecture. The question you have already asked me: How can we build bridges between two in architecture? (see Dialogues, p. 115) is one that I have continued to think about. Could you suggest some examples of practicing being-two in architecture, notably with a democratic perspective in view?*

L. I.: I already suggested some means when giving a talk at the International Architectural Association of London a few years ago, as the text ‘How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?’ shows. For example, instead of centring the house around a dining room and a bathroom – which are functional and undifferentiated spaces which assimilate the couple or the family into a collective unity founded on a loss of individual identity – why not rebuild the residence starting with two small one-room apartments which would replace the common dining-room and bedroom? This spatial topography would make room – in the same space – for each and one’s own world, and thus favours closeness with the other without falling back into undifferentiation. Dwelling could then preserve the individual’s singularity as well as allow a refoundation of a community, beginning with the community of the couple or the family. After analysing many samples of the respective languages of man and woman, I could suggest to architects to give more place in her apartment than in his to relational life, to the relationship between two, to difference, sexuate difference in particular. This could be achieved in different ways. For example, the area for receiving the other would be more visible in her room than in his: a large bed covered with cushions for her and a futon for him, or a lounge area for relaxing together and chatting for one and, for the other, a bar for sharing a drink without the relational aspect being too immediately obvious. The space for working will be less neutral in her apartment, which does not signify that her work is less valuable but that it is not a substitute for relational life. Also, women and men do not appreciate materials, forms and colours in the same way. Men generally prefer metallic and shiny matter, women materials that are warmer to look and to touch. Women would favour rounded forms and men angular forms. Moreover, according to experiments I have carried out with colours amongst boys and girls, the world of each one is also different in that respect, and it would be fitting to take this into account when caring about paint, carpets, bedding and other decorative aspects of each small apartment. These are some initial suggestions to stimulate creativity in order to allow a being and dwelling as two with respect for each singularity and world, which is a condition for desiring and loving in a lasting way.

*A.W.: The cultivation of breath and of perception, both means by which you have suggested we can approach being-two, have correspondences with more Eastern traditions. Heidegger's work also has a relation with Eastern philosophies. Levinas's work has a relation to the Kabbalistic traditions, and love, in Levinas, is thought as a relationship to a sensible other, whilst an ethical relationship is reserved for a transcendental Other. Thus, Levinas distinguishes the sensible and the transcendental in a way that conforms to the tradition of Western thought. For Heidegger, care is more fundamental than love, a way of understanding ourselves as being-in-the-world, and being-with-others. Like Levinas, Heidegger approaches his influences from firmly within the Western tradition. Both these philosophies you reconsider from your own understanding of love. I understand your approach to love amongst other things as reworking the distinction of sensible and transcendental of the Western tradition. It is a way of rethinking the properties of feminine identity. Reconstruction of subjectivity needs to be a collective project. This is the problem I have with rethinking feminism in architecture, and approaching being-two. How could I join, and already think together, a collective work starting from your being-two?*

L. I.: For me there is no opposition between a collective work and my proposals about being-two. The project concerning coexistence in difference that I present in 'How Can We Live Together in a Lasting Way?' could be adopted and promoted by a group of architects having in mind to build or to transform council houses. Perhaps a certain idea of democracy prevents from being in agreement on my perspective. Democracy can be understood as reduction of all people to individuals sharing a common undifferentiated (co)existence and discourse. Or democracy can be understood as an opportunity for each one to live one's own singularity. To attain and enjoy such a possibility, we must, all the time, consider and preserve the difference between us, starting from between us as two. If we do not do that, we fall again into an anonymous community of people in which we lose our subjectivity, our desire, our happiness. I think that neither Heidegger nor Levinas have envisioned this problem with a sufficient attention. For example, if I project transcendence only into the Other and do not preserve it, at every moment, between the other and myself, such a transcendence will correspond to an absolute singularity or to the ideal or Absolute of a people – which, in a way, could amount to a sort of anonymity and runs the risk of a fundamentalism closed to all sorts of other. As for the 'care' of Heidegger, I am afraid that it is too neutral and anonymous to take into consideration the other as such – the other here present with myself in an apparent same space or time but who, in fact, belongs to another world. This configuration is at stake when we

meet with a foreigner, but, even more radically, with the sexuate different other. To forget and neglect this one in collective projects amounts to making life, desire and coexistence impossible for each one. This ought not to be a democratic ideal.

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