

STATEMENT OF INTENT

AMELYN NG

The Tower Project (subtitled 'This Architecture Which Is Not One') frames a seemingly banal urban scenario of building a tower through Irigarayan concepts. Key references in this pamphlet refer directly to quotes from This Sex Which Is Not One [TSWINO], as well as Andrea Wheeler's About being-two in an architectural perspective: an interview with Luce Irigaray [ABT] and The Forgetting of Air [FOA]. These postcards are to be read alongside a cartoon strip presented at the exhibition, a pictorial preface that sets up the project narrative.

This set of postcards present the story of Bethlehem Steel, a US postwar steel giant that produced steel for major building landmarks nationwide (as featured on each card), but was driven into bankruptcy by the very things it created. As cities expanded, a surge in steel demands caused tower developers to look offshore for cheaper imports, marking the rapid demise of the local steel manufacturer.



NARRATIVE

Note: For the full narrative and references please see exhibition material & pages from the various Irigaray texts.

(1)

Plans are drawn up for a large skyscraper project. A steel mill is first built in preparation for mass steel production.

In this monosexual world, woman exists for man: as his supply, caregiver or possession. Without man (tower), the existence of woman (steel mill) is not seen to be validated. [TSWINO: 23, 25, 157]

(2)

The tower's construction is contingent on the supply of steel from the mill. The tower begins to take on formal qualities that the mill could never have obtained for itself.

Man (tower) is attached to mother (mill), whose body is the source of nourishment and birth into the world. Man will always be born of a woman. Yet in her suppressed state she can only project her ambitions onto him, the son. [TSWINO: 42]



THE TOWER PROJECT

The postcards in your hand are photographs of major tourist attractions which were constructed out of Bethlehem Steel. But these images have been tampered with. Infrastructure from the Bethlehem Steel mills have been grafted onto them, resulting in an inextricable tangle between tower and mill; the sheer volume of heavy industrial manufacturing seems to have spontaneously erupt across surfaces of the final form. What has always been suppressed from the public eye is now made visible.

As these picture-perfect building icons become riddled with industrial machinery, there is a sense that these icons are wrestling with something bigger than itself, something that cannot be shaken away. This has not been done to glorify an infrastructural aesthetic; it aims to unnerve the current sensibility of building. The mother cannot be shrugged away or cast off simply by man building new things. Yet there is no winning or losing side here; no triumph nor defeat: it is a difficult, tenuous coexistence that will and



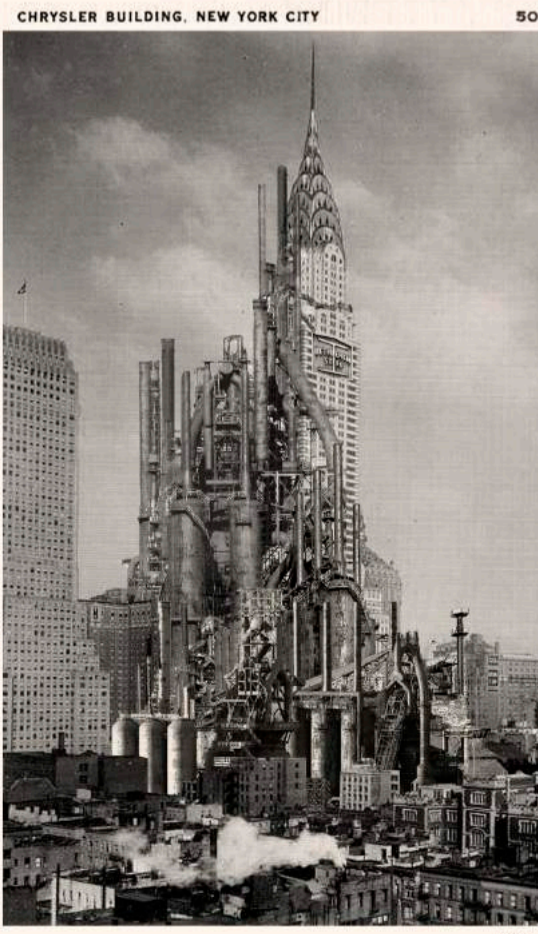
(3)

Upon completion, the tower becomes an icon; eagerly embraced by the city. There is no mention of the mill.

The man-made city is a collection of new objects; an omission of nature. Man (tower) differentiates himself from the mother (mill) as an icon of his own making. Woman (mill) remains excluded from the boy's club that is the city due to her lack of phallic attributes. [TSWINO: 23, 126] [ABT: 97]

(4)

Over time, tower parts wear out and need to be replaced. The mill is to supply these when the tower demands of it. This reflects the notion of women (mills) on the market—a marketable commodity that is to respond promptly to masculine demands and desires; ever only an 'obliging prop' to the icon (man) that takes centre stage. How can the mill exist outside of the fulfilment of the tower? How can she be recognised separately from her (re)productive role, distinct from his every beck and call? [TSWINO: 25, 185]



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can never cease as long as building occurs on earth. The inclusion of bridges is, indeed, deliberate. The images begin to question Heidegger's famed analogy of the bridge that gathers the fourfold around it. Here, the bridges are gathering something else entirely. In fact, the steel mill components appear to be spontaneously rallying together in a joint attempt to interrupt or sabotage the act of bridge-gathering. What is interesting here is that even with a tampered bridge, 'place' has nevertheless been created on each postcard, a medium which is in its nature the tourist marker of any well-known or famous 'place'.

In a way, the postcard acts as a cultural neutraliser. To have something so painfully superficial and touristy represent the ideologically potent theme of sexual difference, one begins ruffling the feathers of popular culture and the prevalent 'tourist' mentality of our times. By the gesture of the postcard, Irigaray's sexual difference is in effect depicted as a type of cultural norm.



(5)

Often, tower projects experience budget blow-outs during construction in order to expand or enhance the building. High pressures on the mill may drive it into bankruptcy. As woman's supply (mill) fails to satisfy man's demands (tower), woman is devalued, psychologically bankrupt, decommissioned. She sees herself as a failed commodity, driven to destruction by the inability to adequately respond to the phallic construction of a world that is not hers. [TSWINO: 61]

(6)

Eventual demolition ensues— a cyclical clearing of the city, but only for more new towers to be erected. Can man repay the debt of birth through death? No, the gift cannot simply be reciprocated— the tower cannot give birth to the mill who gave birth to it. So the cycle continues, with women (mills) living and dying as providers of place for the other, projecting iconic entities external to themselves. How may the mill exist in the city of towers? Will the mill ever have a city of her own? [FOA: 28]



“THE TOWER PROJECT”

OR “THIS ARCHITECTURE WHICH IS NOT ONE” BY AMELYN NG

NOTE:

TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH (& AS A PREFACE TO) THE POSTLARD SERIES.

1 LET'S BUILD A TOWER.

Plans are drawn up for a large skyscraper project. A steel mill is first built in preparation for mass steel production.

In this monosexual world, woman exists for man: as his supply, caregiver or possession. Without man (tower), the existence of woman (steel mill) is not seen to be validated.

2 GIVING TAKING/ DEVELOPING

The tower's construction is contingent on the mill's steel supply. The tower begins to take on formal qualities that the mill could never have obtained for itself.

Man (tower) is attached to mother (mill), whose body is the source of nourishment and birth into the world. Man will always be born of a woman. Yet in her suppressed state she can only project her ambitions onto him, the son- never to realise her own.

3

COMPLETED ICON

Upon completion, the tower becomes an icon, celebrated by the city. There is no mention of the mill.

The man-made city is a collection of new objects; an omission of nature. Man (tower) differentiates himself from the mother (mill) as an icon of his own making. Woman (mill) remains excluded from the boy's club that is the city due to her lack of phallic attributes.

4

OVER THE NEXT DECADE

Over time, tower parts wear out and must be replaced. The mill is to supply these when the tower demands of it.

This reflects the notion of women (mills) on the market- a marketable commodity that is to respond promptly to masculine demands and desires; ever only an 'obliging prop' to the icon (man) that takes centre stage. How can the mill exist outside of the fulfilment of the tower? How can she be recognised separately from her (re)productive role?

5

BANKRUPT OVER-DEMAND

Often, tower projects experience budget blow-outs during construction in order to expand or enhance the building. High pressures drive the mill into bankruptcy.

As woman's supply (mill) fails to satisfy man's demands (tower), she is devalued, psychologically bankrupt, decommissioned. She sees herself as a failed commodity, driven to destruction by the inability to adequately respond to the phallic construction of a world that is not hers.

6

BUILD CITY CLEAR

Eventual demolition ensues- a cyclical clearing of the city, but only for more new towers to be erected.

Can man repay the debt of birth through death? No, the gift cannot simply be reciprocated- the tower cannot give birth to the mill who gave birth to it. So the cycle continues, with women (mills) living and dying as providers of place for the other, projecting iconic entities external to themselves. How may the mill exist in the city of towers? Will the mill ever have a city of her own?