

Thankyou for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. For those of you who know my work, you will recognize a great interest I have in landscape, place, nature and the related ideas of sustainability.

I thought it may be of interest to you to know that I believe that my world view was highly influenced by my childhood experiences in Eastern Oklahoma. An uncle of mine has a farm outside of Talaqua, it is a place that exists in the rhythm of nature, both primitive and magical. My uncle elected to live a quiet “OFF THE GRID” life, with no power, running water or plumbing. He raised a family this way, and it was my fortune to spend summer times and a few winter vacations at his farm.

I want to talk to you today about 4 concepts - as I was preparing this talk seem very basic to me,

So basic and obvious in fact that I wasn't sure why I should talk to you about them at all.

But here is the paradox, if they are so obvious then wouldn't it seem that they would be considered and incorporated into all architecture. That they would be as clear and present as the necessity to make buildings stand up.

What I hope to do today is present the 4 concepts – ideas that I think about most every day. In my practice, my writing and my teaching – And as I do, I would like you to hold these questions in your mind:

1. Do you think these concepts are fundamental to architecture?
2. Do you recognize their presence being considered in architecture today?
3. If you think these concepts are valuable- but not present, what can we do as practitioners to bring about a change that will result in the incorporation of these concepts.

I happen to think that the discussion of sustainability is intimately tied to the overarching concern of these concepts, namely how we choose to conceive of ourselves in the world, and then put into practice these conceptions.

But our mistake in attempting to apply the concept, strategies or consideration of sustainability is to assume that we can “apply” sustainability, like a paint color to architecture.

Rather than understanding that the issue of sustainability – to sustain – belongs to a larger set of concepts– when taken as a whole - transform the practice of architecture.

But before I discuss these concepts I would like to talk about the broader context from which we should consider these ideas.

We are in a time of great flux and ambiguity. Our culture _ and by that I mean the learned behavior and beliefs of a society that is built out of the experiences of language, art and science, spirituality, and our general social activities and interaction.

We – as architects_ play a large part in the formation of culture, because people spend a great time living and working in buildings today. Our work plays a large part in any transformation of culture and a society's beliefs and practices.

Our Culture is in a period of potential redefinition. We can see this in the positions taken by the candidates for the upcoming elections, the discussion of Iraq, energy, and global warming. All underscored by concerns of the economy.

These discussions are grounded by a predominant cultural perspective: which has grown out of the principles of democracy and economics.

What I wonder, is what these principles mean today, as we are reconsidering how some our choices and practices have brought us to our current lives.

How do these principles serve us as we interpret the past and envision the future?

What values and cultural beliefs and practices have these principles created and how do we wish to see ourselves going forward? What type of place do we wish our ancestors to inherit?

A cultural mindset has prevailed over the United States since gaining independence which is directly related to the industrial revolution, which evolved out of the larger conceptions of how the world was being described at the time, through Cartesian, rationalistic terms that Descartes helped to solidify.

One hundred years later, with the Newtonian principles filtering into our cultural conceptions, our vision of the world –

and people in the world- was seen as mechanistic, machines that could be taken down to their elements, parts and pieces- and used and replaced as needed. This idea was cast over the principles of capitalism

and soon the people needed to build up wealth were seen with and dealt with as parts of a machine, abstracted and replaceable. And the rest of the world was seen this way too.

The natural world became “resources.” Abstracted elements / not part of a whole / that were ours for building up the economy of our country, and individual wealth.

This ideology supported the massive transformation of the Earth brought on by the Industrial Revolution, and confirmed our power over the Earth and our naïve vision that saw the world as fixed, observable and predictable

Today – (100 years later) science is no longer seen as infallible, we understand that the world is not simply identifiable through simple observations of phenomena –

that there are only certain things – not all things – that we can hold as definite. Most facts are not forever , that seemingly permanent things are capable of being destroyed.

And that our sense and understanding that the Earth and its Resources as endless has come to an end.

Yet we have not come to a clear understanding of what this knowledge means to our lives. What will truly change, and what new cultural practices will emerge.

It is for these reasons that I say, we are in a time of flux and ambiguity. Our cultural and social assumptions are being challenged. We are rethinking our values. And with the reconsideration of values brings the opportunity for cultural shifts and paradigm transformations.

Perhaps this time of reconsideration may bring about even the re-thinking of how we apply the principles of capitalism.

What I mean by this statement, is rather than working through the mechanized version of capitalism, Rather that us serving the concept of capitalism – as cogs in the wheel – perhaps capitalism should serve us.

Perhaps capitalism and a free-market economy should not be seen as more valuable than our own general well-being, and the health of the Earth.

(Harvard Study example- we are no longer living longer than other societies on Earth)

Of course there is no clear road map. And there are varying views on how we should deal with the situation we find ourselves in.

At one end of the spectrum is the mindset of optimism. The public who is pushing the concepts of sustainability beyond the confines of environmentalism and into the mainstream for consideration. For these people, the time has come to transform our actions, to re-work our cultural assumptions, and to re-think our operative terms of a paradigm.

At the other end of the spectrum is the mindset of fear, Fear of the unknown. An example of this is the recent findings of a Pew Poll which showed a very recent change in the mind-set of the public regarding the issue of energy. Until recently the majority of the American population believed that the energy “crisis” could and should be solved with

individual and group conservation. From this new poll we learn that the American population now overwhelmingly believes that the energy crisis should be solved through resource-development. Across the board: oil drilling, gas explorations, coal mining, and alternative energy.

I find this shift to be immature. we are like spoiled adolescent children who refuse to accept that we must be responsible for our actions, for the state we find ourselves in. That we have yet to learn that to arrive at a place of wisdom, and deep happiness we must first learn respect, humility and patience. We must understand that our immediate desires cannot always come first.

The mindset of fear will bring forth a debilitating malaise of romanticism and regression.

We must instead grasp this moment of flux and push toward a new and positive vision of ourselves in the world that understands itself as not a part from but a part of, not separate and individual but interrelated, not fixed / but organic, not immovable but evolving.

What do these broad cultural considerations mean for architecture?

As I see it, because of the flux in our cultural perspective, architects have the opportunity to both reclaim their role as cultural creators, as arbiters of culture (and what this means in all of its fullness) and also

to expand our role as leaders and teachers of a better way to live on Earth.

Primarily what architects do is provide physical context and reality to an ideology. We make tangible the ideas for inhabiting Earth.

If we use our gifts and training to evolve into a better way of belonging to the Earth, we will make real this new way of thinking into a living reality.

In order to achieve this cultural transformation the way we approach, conceive and develop our architecture must be radically different.

We must begin to think of ourselves as not primarily in service to economic development and speculative commerce, not limited to a fixed set of conditions.

It is from this challenge that I have been thinking of these 4 concepts I mentioned earlier.

These interrelated concepts have as much to do with living on Earth as they do practicing architecture.

They help us recognize the need to be responsive to the place we live in and the people, animals and plants who share these places with us,

that remind us that we are more than the jobs we have, or the wealth that we may command,

that our lives do not end at our own limits and our sense of being extends into a world that we may never understand in completely rational terms.

While I stated earlier that these concepts seem obvious and simple, I have yet to find any architect who fully knits together these interrelated concepts. Yet such architectural occurrences would contribute to the transformation of our culture, and usher in a way of understanding ourselves and the world to connect to our primal sense of being.

The first concept I would like to discuss is POETIC COSMOS.

Through the concept of Poetic Cosmos we conceive the world and universe through the formal and sensual aspects of architecture to embody and make present humankind's connection to the whole.

For example. Including and responding to cosmological occurrences, permanent or temporal to mark our place on Earth - to its extended context, such as the moon and sun, Or stars that pass us in their greater universal cycle.

Observing these universal activities both give meaning to timing and marks of an individual's life, as well as binds them to the larger whole.

They can be moments of celebration or quiet observation

For thousands of years we have been reflecting and recording our observations and beliefs about our place in the universe through our artifacts of habitation.

While recent speculative research documents how these places “work” from a scientific and pragmatic view, what has been neglected is how such artifacts bind a people to their sense of being in the world, providing them with place, context and extended perspective to one another and the world around them (in all of its limits).

From this evolved understanding, the poetic interpretations of the universe, place, people, and spirit spring into action through the things a society makes and invents (as idea or thing). From this mindset all subsequent concepts and practices evolve, and are given context and meaning.

Contemporary architectural examples of the concept of Poetic Cosmos are often expressed through well established cultural traditions

They involve us in practices of living that = when given context by artifacts – become more enriched through our repeated interactions and reflections over time.

They bring to our attention phenomena in the world that we look past every day.

ECOLOGICAL DEEP WELL BEING.

Draws from the belief that our well being is defined by more than the measures of science, and that things in the world have their own inherent value.

From this perspective we understand our choices and activities bare upon an effect more than humanity.

While this may seem altruistic in concept as we begin to understand how we fit into the larger systems of the universe as described through such concepts as quantum physics, we can understand how decisions made for the well-being of other beings or conditions of Earth are an aspect of recognizing our interrelatedness.

Architectural responses to EDWB can be recognized through site selection wherein sensitive and unique places, creatures and plants are preserved beyond the immediately observable social and personal interests.

Sustainability is primarily a strategy of conservation. It is necessary, and becomes a part of who we are when we see the choices and ramifications in the larger cultural context.

Consider these questions:

what do we preserve when we choose not to continue to log the Redwoods in California

What place, animals and plants do we expressly care for when we choose not to drill for oil in the Arctic?

What do we preserve and conserve when we specify locally available materials?

What do we choose or sacrifice when we farm trees vs. clear cut from the forests?

What are the results when we choose alternative energy over conventional, renewable over non-reneable?....

We step away from culling and diminishing the natural world, plants animals and open landscape.

Alternative Energy is critical to preserving and protecting the Earth.

But most often it continues to be considered from the old Newtonian paradigm, Seeing nature as resource, all actions as abstract and distinct from our own lives.

For many architects material and technological choices serve as the incorporation of sustainability into their work.

From this position we miss the true opportunity that Alternative Energy and sustainable materials can provide: to reconnect with the Earth through systems that are tied to the natural rhythms of the world: wind, sun, water and earth.

The issue of sustainability has quickly been consumed by credits and certifications. While this is a benefit to generally educate and bring quick incorporations to developments, LEED and certifications will not be enough to transform our culture, or create truly ecological architecture.

2 Reasons:

1. LEED and the like are tools, but they lure us back to the mindset of consumerist and disengaged cultures.
2. When we accept another's abstracted rules for our own experiences of the world we miss the potential for creating a more place based and authentic architecture.

We should be thinking beyond the specification of the materials as discrete selections and instead consider them more comprehensively: where did they come from, how will it arrive on the site, what process was required for it to achieve its standardized condition.

What natural environment was modified to gain the material?
(grey water, pre-fab and siting, green roofs, local materials)

Architectural responses to Ecological Deep Well Being can be recognized through the engagement in the issues I have just mentioned

The choices made –are more deeply understood when we consider the benefit to the places (local or not) the eco-systems, plants and animals that will continue to thrive through our choices, not despite them.

DWELLING IN PLACE

Consideration of place vs. the modern identity of space

Architectural responses to specific places serve to ground inhabitants to the environment, ecology, bio-region, vernacular culture, while providing opportunities of experience that counter the disconnect of our consumerist, abstract and mechanistic experiences of the world.

Such experiences are valuable because they provide the first-hand sensibilities to the world in which we live.

Sight, sounds, scent and touch become the translators not only for knowing but poetically understanding our place and existence on Earth which encourages and secures the deep sense of being that Heidegger writes of.

Architecture that responds and draws together our sensorial experiences through a multi-layered, time-layered sensation results in a mediation and reciprocity between habitation and inhabitant, between the experience and us.

In its most successful moments architecture that provides for dwelling in place becomes the background of the experience. The non-assuming artifact providing for the organic experience with the world.

RITUAL AND MYTH

Is both designed for and calls forth from its inhabitant - Activates inventive and anticipatory practices within the context of the artifact.

Ritual and myth when incorporated into architecture provides spatial narrative that is open to interpretation and evolving use. It allows for a growing from and corresponds to but is not limited to specific cultural traditions which may be individually derived, familial or communal in scale / and breadth and value.

Rituals and myths incorporated into the artifacts of architecture ground the inhabitant simultaneously in the architecture, place and culture.

The activation of ritual and myth through architecture provides for how someone moves through a space, daily activities.

They extend and evolve the personal stories of life:

- Waking to first light of morning
- Bathing
- Gardening
- Celebrations of birth
- Honoring death
- Love making
- Meals
- Indigenous / Regional cultural activities
- Communal interactions
- Contemplations and reveries
- Observing the passing of the day
- Seasonal celebrations

Spiritual revelations
Fire light

Conclusion

These 4 concepts recall and gather within them the eternal ideals and expression of Love, Peace, Beauty, Wisdom and Harmony – qualities that positively enrich and transform a society.