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at large: *Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Spaces* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996); David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Los Angeles, Cal.: California University Press, 2000); Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2002). Frank Moelaert, Arantxa Rodriguez, and Erik Swyngedouw (eds.), *The globalized City: Economic Restructuring and Social Polarization in European Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

6. Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva, 'Give me a Gun and I will Make All Buildings Move: An ANT's View of Architecture', in *Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research*, ed. by Reto Geiser (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2008), pp. 80-89.

7. Imbroglio was used as the name for the website (www. imbroglio.be) related to the 'The loyalties of knowledge' research project, funded by the Belgian Science Policy, and involving amongst others Serge Gutwirth, Isabelle Stengers, and Bruno Latour. It is dedicated to the study of imbroglios of knowledge, institutions, actants and things.

8. Suggested by Scott Lash in this issue, see the article 'Agency and Architecture: How to Be Critical?'

Agency and Architecture: How to Be Critical?

Scott Lash and Antoine Picon, in conversation with Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet. Comments by Margaret Crawford.

Agency is a notion that brings together, in undoubtedly ambiguous ways, a variety of concerns that currently echo in diverse segments of the architectural debate. Amongst such concerns is that of the role of the architect to effect social or political change, a preoccupation with the performative power of the architectural object, and perhaps essentially, the hope and despair about the efficacy of theory in the world at large. We set out to elicit a conversation addressing the multifarious notion of agency in the broadest possible way, while at the same time locating novel points of intersection between concerns too often perceived as disconnected.

Interrogating agency theoretically leads first of all to the question of its binary coupling with structure, perhaps one of the most central concepts in the understanding of modern society. Secondly, because agency is intimately linked to the idea of a possible 'acting otherwise', it assumes intentionality and criticality, both of which have resonated strongly in the architectural debate. A third fundamental issue, which will allow a better understanding of agency within the specific context of architecture, is that of the architectural object and its complex relation to the individual and the social.

The following text has been assembled from separate interviews with three prominent scholars who have, from different fields, made particular contributions to these issues. Antoine Picon, historian of architecture and technology at Harvard University, interviewed in Paris on 3 December 2008, is widely recognised for his contributions to the historical formation of the architectural discipline, the role of utopia in architecture, and the impact of digital culture. Scott Lash, professor of sociology and cultural studies at Goldsmiths College, has challenged dominant understandings of agency and structure through his influential writings on the notion of reflexivity, and the question of critique and cultural production in contemporary information society. The interview with Scott Lash took place in London on 23 January 2009. Margaret Crawford, professor in architecture and urban studies at Harvard University, is widely known for her work on 'the everyday' in the built environment, and its political implications within and beyond architectural and urban practice. She has responded to our questions via email in December 2008.

Agency versus structure: how to position architecture?

[London, 23 January 2009] Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet: Cast in opposition to the notion of structure, agency has been one of the central questions in the humanities and social sciences. Influenced by various strands of Marxism, agency also tended to be associated with the intention to effect social change against existing societal structures. The structure/agency binary has in certain ways organised large parts of the theoretical landscape, assembling proponents on either side - Gabriel Tarde and Emile Durkheim, for instance - or proposals for a middle ground - like those of Bourdieu or Giddens. Nevertheless, more recent work on the

'non-linear' or horizontal workings of power, reflexivity, the powers of invention, or flows and networks calls this dichotomy fundamentally into question. Is the notion of agency then still meaningful, once we disengage it from its coupling with structure, and shed it of its 'progressive' aura?

Scott Lash: I have a very strong position about this at the moment, and it comes from my research in China of the past three years. In terms of agency, I think there are a lot of problems with Western notions of agency, and Western notions of the individual. I am quite influenced by François Jullien in this matter. Agency presumes a notion of the goal-directed actor. At least for a sociologist like Giddens or myself, agency comes from the classic notions developed by Weber and Parsons, and presumes two kinds of actions: ends-oriented and means-oriented ones. Or, in other words, instrumental and substantively rational ones. Compare it to Kant's first and second critiques. Both presume that the agent sets up a model that he or she will follow. Goal-oriented stuff basically. It presumes a disembodied, rational kind of model.

Against this, I would like to suggest the notion of activity. Activity is much less goal-directed, it is much more situational. It's like situationism in a way: you put yourself down anywhere, and see where it takes you. In China, it's like that: you analyse the situation, and see what arises from it. This also involves abstract thinking, but of a different kind than agency-type thinking. Agency-type thinking presumes a subject-verb-object kind of thinking: this is the object, and this is my plan. It's almost a kind of scientific model you follow.

Isabelle Doucet: When you say abstract but in a different form, do you mean more from the inside rather than the outside?

Scott Lash: I used to think that Chinese thought wasn't abstract. That it was completely embed-ded in the material, immanent. It's not dualist in the sense that Western thought is. Even if we want to talk about immanence in the West, it's an immanence *after* the dualism. Whether it's Latour, Deleuze or anybody. But the Chinese never had the dualism. Chinese thought has immanence but it also involves abstraction. It's just a different kind of abstraction, a more pictorial one perhaps rather than our phonetic, alphabetic one. We thought, with the Greeks, in terms of elements, fire, water, air, earth. The Chinese had a different kind of thinking - the *jin* and the *jang* - hence another kind of abstraction.

But the big thing for me, in terms of action, is that for us it involves a subject-verb-object type of thing - you set your goal, and it's very direct. In China, everything is very *indirect*, and comes out of the situation. A lot of sentences don't have a verb nor a subject. There is not an 'I'. People place themselves, situate themselves. So things are very spatial. Spatial, temporal, relational. But not subject-verb-object. So there is abstract thought, but it's not dualist and not subject-verb-object. It's not classical agency at all. Is it classical structure? I don't know.

Kenny Cupers: So if structure has lost its explanatory power, what do we do then with the notion of agency? If we no longer have this fundamental binary, everything that we used to be able to get at through the notion of agency - social or political relevance, the concept of action or social change, and even intentionality itself - no longer coheres, does it?

Scott Lash: I think also phenomenological intentionality presumes agency, not just instrumental classical theory. Giddens is following classical Parsons/Weber, rather than the kind of Husserlian intentionality. But I think even *that* is a problem in a sense. I'm so much on the border of all this, I'm going to be so influenced by China, but on the other hand I'm always a Westerner. But structure... I don't know.

Kenny Cupers: But does structure become situation then?

Scott Lash: Well, you've said it.... Yes, maybe structure needs to be rethought in certain ways. I do think that we have agency in the West. Okay, not exactly, but pretty close. And I do think we have structure in certain ways. Structure is an interesting question, you know; what is structure exactly? I don't want to go back to Levi-Strauss or Althusser, but... I think maybe you're right, if we're going to try to think about it from a Chinese point of view, the notion of structure would have to change. The Western contract - rights and obligations - is very well-defined. In China, it's not very well-defined, and it's much more long-term. And it's continually negotiated. So in a funny way this kind of relation takes on a structure itself. And I think you're right, it might be a bit more like a situation, but it's also something that almost has its own temporality, rather than the classical, timeless kind of structure *à la* Levi-Strauss.

Kenny Cupers: If you look back from China to the West, how do you think we can think differently about agency here?

Scott Lash: Something more situational first of all. There is something like transaction cost theory in the West, which means transactions finish and then what are the costs. But what if you never stop transacting? Think of a business or economic relation as a continuing transaction. The other person I've been using a lot is the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern: in *The Gender and the Gift* she collapses the gift and the market, the commodity and the gifts you give - something that is going on in China. I think the very anonymity of our monetary system, and the chopping up of loans into bits is part of the problem of Western capitalism. And if we had something that was more relational, more long-term, more transactional, then we would not be in the mess that we're in now. And an oppositional politics can work like

that as well I think, like the economy. I'm really into this in major ways, as you can hear.

[Paris, 3 December 2009] Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet: While we understand the notion of agency first of all in opposition to that of structure - in humanities and social science debates - we are interested in understanding its particular importance in architecture. How have architects understood agency? The recent enthusiasm about the notion of agency in architecture debates seems to us to be shaped by a fundamental conflation: agency is used simultaneously as a concept to interrogate the social concernedness of the profession - the idea that architects can or should effect social change - and the performative role of the architectural object - its efficacy with regards to clients' or users' expectations. What is for you the specificity of the notion of agency for architecture?

Antoine Picon: First of all, by agency, do you mean effectiveness, the fact that theoretical reflection has some impact on practice?

Kenny Cupers: Yes, as well as the more oppositional definition of agency as the individual's capacity for intentional action against what is perceived as hegemonic, or the structural constraints of society.

Antoine Picon: That for me is a very Anglo-American definition. The French are not that obsessed with this definition, because we don't believe that much in individuals. Even in Lefebvre, as far as I remember, it's about the *structure* of everyday life, so it remains very structural. In any case, I don't think the neo-Marxist position, of architecture as a critical agency, is a very general feature in the architectural debate at the moment. Performativity, or architecture doing what it does, seems to be a more general interest. The real question for me, however, is how to construct a political and social relevance for architecture today - relevance more than perhaps 'meaning' in the traditional sense. We

know the traps to avoid. One of them is the belief that architecture is going to change the world, in a kind of mechanistic way. We now know it is not a question of multiplying social housing, although it cannot hurt, but it's not enough and it's not going to happen everywhere in the world. We know that architecture is always a partial project, an unfinished project, by definition incomplete. So how exactly does it have political and social relevance? That is the question. You could even say that architecture is always a failure; it never accomplishes what it intends. So how can it still be socially and politically relevant today? Although there are optimistic dreams of a return to a kind of neo-cybernetic modernity, criticality most of the time implies that we know we cannot go back to the ideal city, or the ideal regional plan. Diametrically opposed then, is to fully accept globalisation, to do only what the client asks, and to be a puppet of market forces. These are the two symmetric pitfalls. You can position yourself as a bit more Marxist, or a bit more 'performalist' - more inspired by neoliberalism. I think this is how the debate is framed today.

Isabelle Doucet: What is interesting here is that those are also precisely the two camps where the notion of agency is harnessed today. What does this mean for our understanding of agency in architecture?

Antoine Picon: This is the argument of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, namely that the new spirit of capitalism is heavily inspired by alternative movements and ideologies. Capitalism today is all about emergence, creativity, indetermination, and so on, which is exactly the vocabulary of neo-alternative movements. This is the fundamental ambiguity of today. It reminds me of an interesting comment I heard recently, namely that the left in the twentieth century was generally in agreement about both the main goals, and the fundamentals of the situation. Class for instance: social democrats and communists alike, all agreed

that the working class was the true engine of history, and that the big goal was the social state. The strategy to get there, then, was what people disagreed about. I think today we are in the opposite situation: we have the same strategies - and this is why capitalism resembles alternative movements, they both use networks and so on - but the objectives are very discrepant. I think this is different for architecture, because it has uncertainties at every level. While there seems to be a relative consensus amongst architects about what reality is - through notions like emergence and so on - both strategy and objective remain totally unclear. That's the difference with political movements, where the reality and goals are unclear but the strategies are known. This is probably where the specificity of architecture lies *vis-à-vis* politics at large.

[Email correspondence December 2009] Margaret Crawford: The dualism of agency versus structure certainly needs to be questioned but I don't believe that either the 'non-linear' flows and networks approach or the 'third way' deals with this issue in a satisfactory way. The important thing is to find an opening for politics. It is clear that the period of extreme critiques (we might call these Xcritiques) in which criticality developed its own rules and momentum, is over. Xcritique virtually eliminated all political possibilities. Theoreticians attacked every imaginable topic with such critical ferocity that, after they were done, only a pile of ashes remained. Instead, we need to acknowledge that dualisms, whatever their weaknesses, will not disappear. Epistemologically we can't do without them. So we need to deal with them more effectively. Instead of opposing big chunks of theory (like structure and agency), we need to take some scissors, cut them into smaller pieces and then reconfigure the pieces. Examining specific issues, precisely locating them in their contexts, then investigating the ways these dualities interact, overlap and intermingle as well as contradict each other. This should produce a more nuanced and refined use of theory.

Criticality: what to do with theory and practice?
[Paris, 3 December 2009] Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet: The notion of agency implies not only intentionality and free will, but also the possibility of criticality. In architecture, this possibility - fostered by critical theory and continuing to haunt contemporary practice, whether in the guise of 'critical practice' or 'the projective' - assumes an often ambiguous relation between theory and practice. How and where can we see criticality at work, as part of theoretical reflection, or in the domain of practice? In other words, what is the location of criticality?

Antoine Picon: Criticality has perhaps been overrated in architecture. It is a notion that comes from very specific contexts - primarily Italy with Tafuri - and has been imported in the United States in very peculiar ways. Architecture is primarily a practice, not necessarily a discipline. It corresponds to a series of disciplines, and a practice is not all the time critical. It's actually most of the time acritical. Likewise theory in architecture has no real critical approach. Most of the time critics do not have a real autonomy *vis-à-vis* designers - how would a critic survive if he would constantly oppose them? The traditional role of theories in art, except in very specific moments, is actually to confirm that they are indeed guidelines or principles in the practice of an art. This is exactly the opposite of criticality. It is a very peculiar turn of mind in fact, to consider that the primary concern of theory is to be critical. I see history as having a more critical role, because it is a deconstruction of the conditions of the past and an exploration of how things change, how the present is constantly jeopardised by historical change. I would say the 'normal' state would be for theory to be acritical and for history to be critical.

Of course there are specific moments in which art, as a practice, is concerned about its foundation - for example when it is undergoing important changes. It is in such moments that a need for

criticality emerges. Critical moments occur when history and theory interconnect. This is how I understand Tafuri's notion of criticality. The critical project, and critical theory, basically took off with the end of modernism. When modernism got criticised and gradually abandoned, it was a problem for both theory and history, and led to a rewriting of some of its basic presuppositions.

Isabelle Doucet: Do you think we might be facing a similar situation today?

Antoine Picon: I think we might very well be heading towards a similar movement today, a similar meeting of theory and history. Digital culture for example, clearly challenges several critical assumptions of architecture. Tectonics, but also scale, is seriously challenged by digital culture. Theorists and critics used to take the relation between architecture and scale for granted. Today, however, architecture's natural relation to scale is accepted as socially constructed. In a similar way, the so-called return of ornaments calls for a re-examination of what is traditionally understood as ornament. In short, digital culture challenges some of the foundations of practice, and we are confronted with a new critical stance. In this situation we need history to make sense again of architecture's own tradition. So, yes, I think we might very well be at a new convergence between history and theory.

Isabelle Doucet: What you say seems very much in opposition to claims by architects like Somol and Whiting, and others advocating a so-called 'postcritical' approach.

Antoine Picon: I think that the so-called 'post-criticality' as promoted by Whiting and others is actually the normal condition for theory, namely to be acritical. What they theorise as a shift is actually the normal development: as soon as paradigms get accepted, they are simply no longer perceived as critical or innovating, and are in that sense per defi-

nition post-critical.

Kenny Cupers: What you call the 'normal state' prompts for me the question of what the distinction is then between art and architecture in this respect. For example, if we consider the idea of the avant-garde - whether we understand its task as to revolutionise art for itself, or to dissolve its boundaries with everyday life - what is at stake for architecture is different than for artistic practice, say painting for instance.

Antoine Picon: What if we would actually let go of this idea of the avant-garde? One of the major differences between art and architecture is that art, to be political, needs to take a critical stance - or reside in the avant-garde pathos. Architecture, to be political, does not necessarily need to be avant-garde. It needs to do what it does. Architecture is deeply 'performative' in its political stance. So I think architecture becomes political at moments of suspension of its clear political meaning. Tafuri's criticality, for example, came in when all the assumptions regarding the participation of architecture in the modern project were challenged, when architecture no longer had a clear political position. Architecture is always both about the reproduction of society as is, and about proposing an alternative future: architecture is always between ideology and utopia. Today we are faced with a renewed question of criticality, because architecture is in a real need to redefine its political agency and to reposition itself, in terms of sustainability for instance, because we just simply cannot go on designing Prada shops. I think what we're looking for is a new ideology, a new standard regime or belief about architecture's agency in the world at large. This means we also need to rethink architecture's relationship with utopia.

Kenny Cupers: What then would be the repercussions and potentials for doing research in architecture?

Antoine Picon: Two things. First of all, at the beginning of a new ideological construction, the big dilemma for historians is to use the ideology they're embedded in, while at the same time being aware that it will eventually change. More than practitioners, historians therefore need to be self-critical and avoid getting too embedded. Secondly, if we take the understanding of field, radiance, and so on seriously, mapping becomes crucial. Agency is to be first understood through new innovative ways of mapping. We need to ask again what the categories of mapping are. This implies that the question of representation - in the almost artistic sense - becomes crucial.

Isabelle Doucet: What do you mean concretely by mapping in this context? How does it relate to the metaphorical use of maps and diagrams in architecture at the moment?

Antoine Picon: There is a huge question for example about how to map networks. And mapping is also about how you understand theory, for instance in network theory, the degree of connectivity of a network, how you visualise that, and so on. The reason why I am sceptical about diagrams is that they are simplified maps, and how can we simplify maps that we don't have yet at our disposal? I propose mapping primarily as a project for history and theory. Part of the function of architecture is to displace things, and metaphor is one way to do so. That's why practitioners use maps by displacing it in the metaphoric sense. And that's why most of the diagrams architects produce are too normative and simplifying.

Isabelle Doucet: What are then the potentials for a critical practice based on shortening the distance between theory and practice?

Antoine Picon: Compared to architectural critics and theorists who attempt to follow as close as possible in the footsteps of practitioners, I have,

probably because I am a historian, different obsessions. I rather ask myself: what is the picture, what is the general configuration of the ballet, what are the dancers doing?

Kenny Cupers: That seems to imply a fundamental belief in a form of distance to practice.

Antoine Picon: I think, ultimately, historians are fascinated by two things: what people have in the head, and how they behave. And then the possible relations between the two. An architectural historian is not indifferent to practical questions: he is fascinated by practice yet he is not a practitioner.

Kenny Cupers: What do you think about the argument that, because of the speed of contemporary culture, it is necessary to follow the object closely, and thus to collapse the distance of the researcher with the object of research?

Antoine Picon: That to me is a little bit to reinvent the wheel. In the humanities and social sciences there is always a conflict between a deep, emphatic understanding of the object, and the need to take a distance from it. This is the old dilemma of the ethnologist and of all the modern social sciences more generally: you're supposed to be both inside and outside of the thing you are investigating. For example, if you want to research the way new modelling software is changing architecture, you need an understanding of that software. In other words, I would argue for participation to a certain extent.

Isabelle Doucet: If criticality is to be located mainly in the realm of history, is the idea of a self-reflexive or critical architecture practice then a contradiction in terms?

Antoine Picon: No, I think, as a practitioner, you have to be critical. Yet, only up to a certain point. Architects have always been tempted to erase

academics, and to be both the practitioners and the academics. But it has never really worked. It's true that with the digital, the producer can be the consumer - the internet was the first product designed solely by its users - so there are short circuits. But one should not exaggerate. Architects ultimately want to build. This does not mean architects cannot be true academics at some point in their lives or make significant contributions to the debate (take Koolhaas for example). Conversely, critics like Sanford Kwinter make significant contributions to the intellectual debate by being very close to the world of design. But I don't think you can forever maintain the distinction.

[Email correspondence December 2009] Margaret Crawford: The problem with the narrative of 'criticality' followed by 'post-criticality' is that, in architecture, criticality was never actually critical. Its concerns were so distant from the real economic, political and social issues that the profession and architectural production faced, that it ended up serving as an excuse to disengage and pursue a purely formalist practice. Thus, 'post-criticality', by simply inverting an already fictional 'criticality', produced an equally questionable acceptance of the status quo. Instead, I would propose a more flexible criticality which addresses specific questions and can be selectively critical about things that really matter. This could provide an opening for a more politically engaged approach to architecture, grounded in the complex realities of contemporary life.

[London, 23 January 2009] Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet: Dissociated yet engaged, architectural theory seems to take on the nature of contemporary cultural critique: it is neither launched from a transcendental, privileged position, nor fully immersed in the velocity of contemporary production. If we agree to 'follow the object' as you suggest, and accept the ambiguous nature of this relation, can criticality without transcendence still be critical? Can we conceive of forms for critique that do not

resort to the notion of distance, and that thus entail a different relation between theory and practice?

Scott Lash: Doing research in China makes you return to who we are, in the West. We are Greek, maybe Christian Greek, maybe Jew Greek... the Greekness, it's science, it's logic, it's subject-verb-object thinking, it's the grammar, it's ontology. But what's happening in China is not ontology; it's something else. Basically, critical thinking comes from the Jew-Greek and it is not ontological. It always includes the messianic, the utopian, that is, a 'to come'. When I say critical theory, I mean Benjamin, some of Derrida, Agamben, or Adorno. Heidegger is clearly ontology: being is always already there, as opposed to the 'to come' of Agamben for instance ['*The Coming Community*']. Deleuze is not a 'to come' at all, he's more like Heidegger in that sense. The critical goes back to Kant of course. When he explains enlightenment, it means asking 'what can I know?', 'what should I do?', and 'what can I hope for?'. The 'what can I know?' is the first critique, it is knowledge; 'what should I do?' is the second critique, it's ethics. But that's not yet critique! Critique is in the third one, the 'what can I hope for?', which entails the utopian and the messianic: that's where critique is. And it works *out of* the ontological. Ontological difference is the difference between Being and beings. But this is not at all what Derrida is doing: when he talks about difference, he starts from ontology, but it goes to the border between what's ontological and what is not. And that is why I think Derrida, Levinas, and others talk about infinity. Heidegger's ontology by contrast is finite: finite beings up against death. I think that's where critique is most interesting to me.

In *Global Culture Industry* we focused on the real, the let-it-happen, while the symbolic was only there in fragments. What I would now probably say is that, apart from the real, the symbolic is important, and so is the imaginary. *All three* are important. We can't help but symbolise. I'm think-

ing here about Durkheim and Benjamin. In his piece on 'the languages of man', Benjamin talks about the distinction between thing- or animal-language, and man-language. While the first two work through images and mimesis, man-language is always symbolic. Durkheim, in 'Elementary Forms of Religious Life', also makes the distinction between symbols and images. Even animals can have images, and his critique of empiricism is that it works through an image-logic, a *tabula rasa* and then images. And I am convinced we are irreducibly symbolic creatures. There is the symbolic and it is important. But today, it has become fragmented, as I said in *Another Modernity* and other people have done too, using Benjamin. What I now think we need to work for, is a culture sector in which, in a very imaginative way, the cultural, the symbolic and the real are stitched together. We can no longer think of the symbolic, real, and imaginary as being ordered on different levels: they are on the same level; they can be manipulated, and are malleable. All three are equally important. Whether you're an architect, artist, thinker, new media activist, or political activist, you're always stitching all three together in very different ways.

Isabelle Doucet: So how could we rethink criticality in this respect? And what kind of relation between theory and practice would it imply?

Scott Lash: I'm taking on critical theory much more than I was. *Critique of Information* was in a lot of ways anti-critical theory, or at least, it was defining critical theory in a way nobody would accept it as critical theory. The same counts for *Global Culture Industry*, which was still completely Deleuzian.

Isabelle Doucet: Global Culture Industry was indeed very much focused on the real; it was very descriptive. So if we were to rethink criticality it wouldn't be through either the real, or the symbolic, or the imaginary, but through all three at the same time?

Scott Lash: Actually, it would be an inventive re-stitching together of all three, and also of the fragments of all three, fragments of something that was much more integral in the past. It would suggest not just a celebration of the real against the other two, but also the importance of the symbolic, and the imaginary. To have a politics, we need to work with all these fragments. We need a little more pattern, a little less noise.

Isabelle Doucet: And also... a more critical approach perhaps?

Scott Lash: Yeah, and more critical too. The credit crunch has discredited not only the Anglo-American model and consumer culture, but also the positive fetishisation of invention. The trick is how to lose some of the consumer culture, and keep all the invention. I think what's going on in China, and what also preoccupies the West, is the bringing together of relationality and invention - in some kind of critical mode. Even if I don't particularly like capitalism and commodification, it is just true that markets are and always have been a space, not just of commodity exchange, but of invention. *Global Culture Industry* was about nothing but invention. But then I saw, through China, a much more relational side. Capitalism and invention, when they get out of hand, become destructive, for example of the environment. I don't want to lose the invention bit, but it's not the whole story. We are programmed into invention but also into commodification. The question I am addressing right now is how we can keep all the stuff that we need, while at the same time changing.

The object and the individual: what are the intentions of architecture?

[Paris, 3 December 2009] *Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet: Recent work in the social studies of science has taken the analysis of agency to include objects and 'non-human actors'. In architecture however, the idea that agency can be situated beyond human intentionality, in the interactions of people and (architectural) objects, seems hardly revolutionary at first sight. Does the focus on objects, images, and processes in architecture - instead of actors, classes or causalities as in many social sciences and humanities disciplines - entail a fundamental difference in the way agency is understood?*

Antoine Picon: I would like to respond to this question by way of the changing importance of the individual. Part of the difficulty we have today is what to make of a more and more individualised society, as described by many scholars, for instance François Ascher in the French context. Traditionally, political agency was made synonymous with class structure. The question was how to position architecture in the class structure debate. Even if you were a right-wing person wanting to re-institute community, class remained the starting point. We are very ill at ease today with a society where inequality, and thus also class inequality, has all but disappeared, but at the same time the most significant experiences in life are based on the individual. In other words, what the political agency for architecture is in an age of Facebook remains very unclear. What is utopia in an age of individuality? Utopia used to be all about the collective, so what kind of collective can we build in an age for individuals, and of individual destiny? The only progress today is the fulfilment of individual destiny, in some ways, but I think we have to reinvent the engine of a global destiny. Right now we live in an age of suspension or shock, in an eternal present that is threatened by apocalypse, by an abrupt ending - be it global warming or global terrorism, always something inevitably global. But I don't think this will last, I see it as a kind of transitional phase.

Kenny Cupers: If we take this condition of individuality as a basis, then what does this mean for our understanding of intentionality? Not only as it pertains to the production of architecture, but also because it necessarily entails the question of

un-intentionality - the unintended consequences of any action - which brings us to the question of the contemporary city.

Antoine Picon: Well, my own take on this comes from my work on the notion of the cyborg, or what I call disrupted identity. We are no longer trapped within our own bodies, we live in the space of mediation and we fully inhabit our various mediations. This is a model you can see at different levels, from molecules and genes to the universe. In molecular biology for instance, recent research indicates that genes do not follow an assembly line model, but need to be thought of as a society of bits and proteins that function in a complex network. This is also how we can conceive of society: the individual is no longer a dot, but a network. Even the human body can be seen as a society of modules that interact with each other. So the big question for architecture then is: how do we build for a society of networks, a society of networked individuals? I think this is where social meaning can be reconstructed. And this has direct implications for the human /non-human divide. Latour is continually fascinated by the fact that we are constituting hybrids of human and non-human. But for me, the most important thing is to begin from the fact that we are always truly and intimately spatialised. This is why Sloterdijk is really interesting, especially in the first volume of *Spheres*, where he says about two interacting faces, that the spirit or the mind is actually in between, and not in the mind or head of the individuals. This suspends for me the question of whether it is human or non-human. I think we are still very Cartesian in our reluctance to envisage that we fully inhabit space as human beings - and today's space is a very peculiar one, a networked space full of artefacts. One of my hypotheses at the moment is that 'affect' is something that characterises not what happens in the head, but what happens through this kind of spatialised identity - which is why 'affect' is linking object and subject and in some ways transcending the distinction between them.

Kenny Cupers: How would this shift in the way we think about materiality and the individual be able to help us to understand the social in architecture?

Antoine Picon: This is my intellectual obsession at the moment: to understand how we feel things differently, experience differently. This transcends the idea of the cyborg, because I think the entire *sensorium* is redefined as a result of this new conception of the subject. Digital culture for me was always the symptom of something else, rather than a sort of magical trigger. I am not a technological determinist. One of the reasons for the success of Deleuze is that rethinking continuity was the big philosophical issue, which also explains the return of landscape, and also of the city. What happens if we think of the city not only as a field of discrete actors, but as a seamless, radiant field. This is the big question about the city, a very different approach from older ways of looking, for instance through class analysis.

[Email correspondence December 2009] Margaret Crawford: For me, a more important question than the human / non-human is to understand the agency of the unintentional actor - the slum dweller or street vendor, who, through everyday practices, challenges existing ways of thinking, or reveals new economic, social and cultural possibilities. Although the results may be very different from the intentions (and certainly any reduction of these to simple survival needs to be questioned) they can have very powerful implications for architecture and politics. Years ago, Ernest Pascucci told me that 'popular culture does the work of theory'. We are seeing more and more of this 'theory from the bottom up' and we need to pay attention to it.

[London, 23 January 2009] Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet: In contrast to the reflexive process of production, circulation and consumption you describe in Global Culture Industry, and despite the complexity of actions building entails, architec-

tural production is still very conservative about the notion of authorship. Is this symptomatic of a more fundamental specificity of architecture compared to other forms of cultural production? How is architecture's being-in-the-world different? Can we consider agency in architecture beyond the attribution of individual intentionality, and if so, what happens to the idea of criticality?

Scott Lash: Architecture is different because... Critique always has some kind of transcendental, is always outside of the empirical with which we are engaging. And I think art surely is: it always opens out into something that is transcendental. But I don't think architecture does in the same way. Architecture and design are largely about taste. In Kant's third critique, he criticises more empiricist thinkers, who talk about taste all the time. And taste is something that is completely empirical, that does not open up into what Kant calls the sphere of freedom. Whereas art does. And judgement does, at least in the sense of the third critique. Judgement always opens out into either a 'to come', in Lyotard's sense, or some sort of sphere of freedom, the prophecy of criticality, and so on.

Kenny Cupers: The same way Bourdieu's critique of taste is one-dimensionally social, leading to a closed realm?

Scott Lash: That's exactly what I was thinking yes. Bourdieu's is a social critique of judgement, in French *critique social du jugement*, and Kant's is a judgement critique of the social, moving it exactly the other way around. But the thing about design and architecture is that they work much more through taste, whereas art moves right on to the sphere of freedom. Architecture remains very much in the register of taste but sometimes it moves up to that other realm. The work of Koolhaas or Hadid has something transcendental about it in some ways. Or the transcendental and the empirical collapse in it, which is also perhaps the symbolic and the imagi-

nary, no longer being separated.

Kenny Cupers: Is this how you understand the intertwining of art and architecture in the global culture industries?

Scott Lash: Design especially, and perhaps also architectural design, really works in this register of taste, as do the culture industries. It's funny to me that Bourdieu ends up being a sociological positivist really, making critique impossible. His social critique of judgement is almost like a critique of critique: critique's critique is that critique is not possible. So I'm coming back to the idea of immanent critique, as in *Critique of Information*, and *Global Culture Industry*.

Isabelle Doucet: Critique no longer from above, but as you say, from within. In the realm of architecture, this brings us to the idea of a 'critique through practice' - against what is perceived as the more conventional domain of critique, namely theory. But how exactly could practice then be critical in a different way? And is it then people like Koolhaas you see as doing this?

Scott Lash: Not really. What you've got is this fantastic invention that's going on. I think what people like Koolhaas do is start from the register of taste and then somehow open it up, into the sphere of freedom, in the Kantian sense. And what we always thought of as just taste, also has this other, namely freedom. Critique through practice is one thing we wanted to do with the Centre for Cultural Studies, whether it's new media or shows or whatever.

Isabelle Doucet: Do you think this is the way new theory can be produced today? Because we also continue to see it being produced high up, and then trickling down. Is this model still applicable? Are there practitioners now who really change the turns of the theoretical discussion? Or do we need to understand this as part of some kind of

move against theory - considering that in architecture culture there seems to be such a paradoxical tendency recently?

Scott Lash: Well, I think it's a very theoretical thing to do, to theorise the end of theory. It mirrors the attention given to Latour today. His is perhaps the most influential paradigm in sociology today. And Latour is brilliant and a very implicit theorist. But he doesn't really write theory. I find it slightly disingenuous, to constantly put theory down, and yet have such a strong stake in theory at the same time: to say 'we can't be asking the big questions' and at the same time really asking them. Then why put other people down who are asking it too?

Kenny Cupers: Might it be because he too is infatuated with the real, as you mentioned before?

Scott Lash: I don't think it's critical theory that he does. For me, it is individualist because it starts with the individual actant, and then the networks kind of come from the individual actant. I don't think it starts from relations.

Kenny Cupers: What would a more relational approach be like?

Scott Lash: It would start from the relation, and wouldn't presume that these actor networks are somehow strategically power-oriented, are engaging and combating each other.

I don't think theory has ever stopped a war. I do think that there are exchanges. The art sector surely has taken on theory and theorists in a huge way. Conceptual art especially. And also what you could almost call conceptual architecture. Not just Rem, but also Multiplicity, with Stefano Boeri. A kind of exploration of urban change on the ground, like in China, a ground that seems laden with concepts and ideas. Either the work or looking at what is going on makes you think as a theorist. I think the key is to start from the situation, and the legibility of the situation.

Isabelle Doucet: Perhaps one of the more useful ideas in Latour is exactly this proposal to start from the complexity of the situation - in the sense of what Isabelle Stengers and others have called an imbroglio - and then to retrace the threads. How feasible, innovative or fruitful is such an approach to you, considering that it doesn't allow you to predict where it will lead you to?

Scott Lash: Because I'm critical of the notion of action, I come to it from a slightly different direction. There are assumptions of instrumental rationality in terms of what the network does; that I think also sometimes is a network of individuals. That's why I prefer to use Marilyn Strathern, who really starts from the relation. The question is how, in terms of research. It's a really good question. In *Global Culture Industry* we were influenced by Appadurai, Kopytoff, as much as by Latour and also just by the research itself.

What is valid knowledge, in a way, is the question. It is a different kind of method. It's not even a laboratory. I'm not trying to discredit Latour, Koolhaas or Obrist in their use of the notion of laboratory, but it is not a laboratory at all: it is just the opposite, you're out there where it's happening. A laboratory means control, and this, in contrast, is engaging with the fabric. If it's an experiment, it's another kind of experiment, not a laboratory experiment. Almost like social engineering, not in the proper sense, or even the social democratic sense, but social engineering that doesn't really know what's going on. Social and material engineering, *socio-material engineering*. In which you're dealing with a material-social environment and you try to work with it, as much as possible, as a planner or researcher, or both.

Isabelle Doucet: It seems that one should at least acknowledge the engineering through several labo-ratories, and explore not only their different modes of experimentation and knowledge production, but also the interaction between them...

Scott Lash: We need to figure out how to think about experimentation outside of the lab, and even beyond the laboratory model. A different notion of experiment. That's why I'm thinking an engineering experiment, a socio-material engineering, which sounds like a swear word, because it sounds too old-fashioned social-democratic, you know, but maybe it's interesting to use a kind of engineering metaphor to think about it. It gives you a strong material aspect as well as a strong social aspect. And maybe we're situated, entering a different kind of planning. Where you are, as much as possible, into the fabric, and things are arising from that. It's not objective knowledge, because you only get there through a huge involvement.

And I think this ultimately brings us back to the notion of relationality. It is not just that the relation comes before the individual, but that our relation comes right before you and me, and does not come out of your or my intention. The intentions will come from the relation rather. And the other thing is that it is somewhere between the virtual and the actual. It is not the virtual and not the actual, it is in between the two. The virtual gets actualised and then it's done. This is something that is in between the virtual and the actual, always continuing. Politics are very different when you start from the situation, when you start from something that is much more relational, that is not from the individual at all. And that is something that we need to take on board, urgently, here in the West.

Biographies

Margaret Crawford is currently Professor of Urban Design and Planning Theory at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Her research focuses on the evolution, uses and meanings of urban space. Her publications include *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns; The Car and the City: The Automobile, the Built Environment and Daily Urban Life and Everyday Urbanism*. From Fall 2009, she will be Professor of Architecture at UC Berkeley.

Scott Lash is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldmiths College (University of London). His publications include *The End of Organized Capitalism* (with J. Urry, 1987), *Reflexive Modernization* (with U. Beck and A. Giddens, 1994), *Another Modernity, A Different Rationality* (1999), *Critique of Information* (2002), and *Global Culture Industry* (with C. Lury, 2007).

Antoine Picon is Professor of the History of Architecture and Technology at the Harvard Graduate School of Design where he is also serving as director of the doctoral program. He has published extensively on the relations between architecture, urban design, science and technology. Devoted to the perspectives opened by the development of digital architecture, his next book will deal in more detail with some of the issues he addresses in his interview.

Kenny Cupers and Isabelle Doucet, editors of this issue.