Beyond Discourse: Notes on Spatial Agency

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From a sociological point of view, discourse includes all that a particular category of agents say (or write) in a specific capacity and in a definable thematic area. Discourse commonly invites dialogue. However, in architecture (as in all professions), discourse is not open to everyone but based on social appropriation and a principle of exclusion. Laypersons are not entitled to participate in the production of the profession as a discipline.[1]

Power can be taken, but not given. The process of taking is empowerment itself.[2]

The word 'agency' is becoming increasingly used and with this perhaps abused. In standing for almost anything, the idea of architects acting as agents can be associated with the most conservative of actions. In the worst-case scenario, agency just denotes 'acting on behalf of': on behalf of a contractor, a client, developer, etcetera. So, what - if not that - may the notion of agency mean within architectural production if it is to gain a more empowering sense? If we take 'agency' in its transformative sense as action that effects social change, the architect becomes not *the* agent of change, but one among many agents.[3]

But, what then, you might ask, is the role of the architect?

Most think that the architect is someone who has ideas, acts as an author of these ideas, and runs projects to deliver these ideas. As author, the architect has *authority*, which at the same time is a prerequisite for one's credibility as a professional.[4] It is this supposedly unfettered sequence from idea to final product that is relayed through the media, and also perpetuated through the educational system.

We all know that this story, this line of thought, isn't true: that architecture in its widest sense is rarely delivered through an individual; but the mythology of the sole architect as hero-author is still played out through the figures of Rem*s*, Zaha*s*, Norman*s* *et al*. The use of first names gives a comforting familiarity with genius that disguises the reality of how little of the built environment is associated with any architect-author whatsoever. This includes the developer-driven housing estates, as well as the ubiquitous warehouses, industrial sheds and garages. It also includes all those buildings that are produced with architects who fall below the radar of publication but whose values are still shaped by the mythology, and live in the hope (against hope) that one day they might cross over to the other side of fame. Almost inevitably these buildings simply don't have the looks to make it into the magazines and therefore remain unpublished and unheard of.

The story that follows here, therefore, is that of the architect as an anti-hero, someone who co-authors from the beginning, someone who actively and knowingly gives up authority. Someone who doesn't work in the foreground, but takes a step back. Someone who is part of the process, and sometimes but not always the initiator of the project.

We use the word 'story' to mark an escape from the inward-looking and excluding discourse that has dominated so much recent architectural theorising and the episodes that follow below present a series of related instances that develop and drive the subject.

We are less interested in whether we are living in a critical or post-critical era, because these terms circle round each other. Indeed, it is the fate of all 'post' terms (postmodern, post-critical, post-theoretical) that they never escape the hold of the condition that they would wish to succeed. Just, as Zygmunt Bauman notes, postmodernity is no more than 'modernity without illusions', so post-theorising is theorising without brains.[5] Against *Rem's* remark that architecture *per se* is unable to be critical and that it is impossible to make a creative statement that is based purely on criticism,[6] we argue that architecture as a discipline is inherently political and therefore immanently critical: either by negating or confirming a position. Koolhaas, it would appear, is falling into the trap of understanding critique in its negative sense, and thus one that inhibits his creativity, which is understood as necessarily positive. We, on the other hand, take the word critical in the early Frankfurt School sense, as something that starts out with an unravelling of the social reality of the given condition so as to be able to understand how to transform it into something better.[7] The story thus attempts to make a case for architecture as a socially and politically aware form of agency, situated firmly in the context of the world beyond, and critical of the social and economic formations of that context in order to engage better with them in a transformative and emancipatory manner.

Spatial agency

It is here that a particular understanding of the term 'agency' becomes important. If the word is to have any transformative potential then it needs to exceed the exchange-driven meaning of providing a service to another, where the other is typically a client

with a certain set of short-term demands. Anthony Giddens's formulation of agency remains possibly the most relevant counterpoint to this self-serving understanding of agency.[8] He states first and foremost that agency 'presumes the capability of acting otherwise'.[9] This statement, in all its simplicity, is disarmingly radical in an architectural context. To admit to the possibility of doing otherwise is counter-intuitive to the professional, who is brought up on the foundation of certain knowledge leading to certain solutions. The exchange system of professional service is based on exactly this premise of certainty, because merely to offer the potential for the 'otherwise' is to offer up one's fragility, and this is the symptom of the amateur, a symptom that must be avoided at all costs. Thus to accept Giddens's sense of agency is also to accept a new sense of what it may mean to be an architect, one in which the lack of a predetermined future is seen as an opportunity and not a threat.[10]

To challenge the norms of professional behaviour is not to dismiss the role that professional knowledge may play, but it is to argue that the deployment of this knowledge should be set within other ways of acting. To be an agent, for Giddens, is to act with intent and purpose, but that purpose 'cannot be adequately defined [...] as dependent on the application of learned procedures'.[11] Purpose is also guided by hunch, intuition, negotiation, and other conditioned reflexes, which are based on one's experience in the world, as both professional *and* human. For Giddens this 'mutual knowledge, incorporated in encounters, is not directly accessible to the consciousness of the actors',[12] but is fundamental nonetheless. In contrast to what he calls 'discursive consciousness', in which matters are explicit and explainable, mutual knowledge is 'practical in character'. But - and this is the key point - the discursive and the practical are by no means mutually exclusive: 'the line between discursive and practical consciousness is fluctuating and permeable',[13] he argues, suggesting that each draws on

the other in the act of agency. Again this is a challenge to professional norms, both academic and architectural. If one cannot explicate, then one cannot claim authority; hence the domination of the discursive over the practical, of discourse over doing. Hence too the marginalisation of discourse as it increasingly needs to feed off itself, discourse on discourse, in an ever-spiralling effect of internalisation with its accompanying autonomy. The call for a move beyond discourse does not throw away discursive consciousness (because that would be post-discourse, i.e. stupid discourse) but sees it working with and on behalf of practical transformative action.

There is a central aspect of architectural production that Giddens's theory of agency cannot accommodate. His agents intervene in the world directly, whereas the architect does so indirectly, through buildings. It is an indirect intervention because the effect of a building is so highly contingent on other forces beyond the architect's direct control. The human agency of the architect is thus always mediated by the non-human presence of matter and in this mediation, intent is at best compromised, at worst blown apart. A response to this dilemma is to use John Law and Bruno Latour's formulation of agency, and so to see architectural production as a network of actors, human and non-human, in which both architects and their buildings assume roles as agents (amongst many others agents). The problem with this construct, as Bruno Latour himself later notes, is that it lacks intentionality: it might describe a dynamic state of affairs but it does not institute what we have taken as the defining point of agency, namely its potential to transform the given.[14] It is necessary therefore to assert the basic principle of human purpose in architectural agency, but then to see this played out in a spatial - for which in a very Lefebvrian manner read *social* - setting. The difference between this spatial production and that of the building as agency is that space is necessarily temporal. Whereas the building as matter is often

cast as static - there better refined through taste and technique - social space is dynamic and its production is a continuous process. Far from setting the human (architect) against the non-human (building), spatial agency sees the whole process as a continuity, motivated in the first instance by intent, and then open to adjustment, 'acting otherwise', as it unfolds in time. In treating the human and non-human as separate agents, there is always the possibility that responsibility of one for the other is lost. Once the building is handed over to the client (service completed according to the architect's contract), so by implication is 'responsibility' for it handed over. In contrast, spatial agency, when read as a continuity of action and occupation, means that all agents involved in the production of a building have to face up to their social responsibility because they are always tied into a temporal chain and so must always be alert to events further down the line over which they have some (but not total) influence.

Agency and power

Spatial agency thus inevitably exposes the architect to issues of power - and in particular of how power might be used and how it might be abused by architects acting as spatial agents. Agency, as Giddens reminds us, is intractably tied to power - an early definition of agent in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is: 'one who exerts power or produces an effect'.[15] The words used here are telling: power exerted is the power of one person over another, which is hardly consistent with the notion of responsibility. And then there is the 'or' - as if one can either exert power or produce an effect but not both. A better definition in relation to spatial agency is that the agent is one who effects change through the empowerment of others. Empowerment here stands for allowing others to 'take control' over their environment, for something that is participative without being opportunistic, for something that is pro-active instead of re-active.

Empowerment is thus not about the transfer of

decision-making power from 'influential' sectors to those previously disadvantaged or 'other' sections of society, but about these 'others' taking control and initiating different or 'alternative' spatial processes including, but not restricted to, the making of buildings.

The question, therefore, is what part the architect might and can play in this process of empowerment.

It is here that the word agency can be taken at face value, in terms of the architect acting as an agent with and on behalf of others, not in the sense of simply reacting to the often short-term market-led demands of clients and developers, but in the sense of the longer-term desires and needs of the multitude of others who build, live in, occupy, visit, and perceive architecture, acting. Today, building activity in modern capitalist societies, along with the labour of architects and building workers are either transformed into, or are produced as commodities. That is, they become things that are created primarily to be bought and sold in the market place. This produces a fundamental shift in the functional and social objectives of building production. It is not enough for instance that a house should stand up, keep out the bad weather, etcetera. It must first and foremost make money for the land development company, the construction firm and the banks. In the context of an increasingly privatised built environment of fortified housing estates, retail parks and surveilled city centres, human pleasure, environmental comfort and liberty tend to be defined in terms of monetary value and the defence of property.[16]

Under such circumstances it can prove very difficult to produce built environments that prioritise human need and which consciously explore and expand the realm of the individual and social freedom. In order to effect such a move it is therefore necessary to start with a critique not of mainstream

practice *per se* (because of the danger of ending up with a parody of a group of straw men) but of the operations of present day neoliberal economic policy and capitalist production that frames practice. This in turn suggests a method of production of the built environment that, in the words of Jonathan Charley, 'resists the environmentally damaging and socially destructive aspects of capitalist urban development'[17] and is in opposition to the globalised capitalist system that is in such a state of turmoil right now.

Working in 'alternative' ways on 'alternative' projects in the here and now suggests a move beyond the architect's present day field into something that in itself is able to express something positive, something that is not just an antithesis to something, such as post-capitalism would be to capitalism, but something that develops affirmative agency from within. Up until very recently it has been all too easy to forget that a lot has already been done to challenge capitalist hegemony. Much has already been achieved in opening up the 'imagination to the possibility of a liberated concept of labour and space'.[18] Just at the moment, in early 2009, when the crisis caused by the unfettered market is forcing even the most hardened institutions to rethink their values, practices that have been critical of the hegemony appear not so much as radical alternatives, but as prescient harbingers of new ways of acting.

What follows is one route through some stories of such agency, traced by means of short examples of such alternative spatial agency, each of which has an explicit political or ideological starting point. They are presented as episodes in no particular order because, in the nature of minor narratives, they do not build up in a chronological sequence of cause and effect. Where the major narrative of architectural history presumes a linear progression, these episodes are read as a set of loosely connected actions that cross time and space to suggest but

Fig. 1: muf offices, London (copyright Tatjana Schneider)

not determine a pattern of behaviour. The aim is not just to bring up examples that have previously fallen beneath the architectural radar, but to contextualise them within a critical framework. By doing so, this 'history' breaks away from the recent fashion of post-theorising and still ending up with pure form. It attempts to move beyond discourse for discourse's sake, and posits some examples of spatial production that live up to the promise of that elusive term 'agency'.

Episode 1: muf

Founded in London in 1994, muf officially coins itself as 'a collaborative practice of art and architecture committed to public realm projects'.[19] The practice [fig. 1] was set up defiantly and explicitly as an alternative to what they had seen as mainstream practice. As the clearest defining set of principles in setting up muf, Liza Fior, one of the co-founders of the practice, mentions the 'bringing together of interesting women'.[20] Feminism isn't openly mentioned, yet there is an underlying and often explicit tenet of feminism within their work, which at the same time is consistent with the tenets of spatial agency. In particular the notion of collaborative practice signals a commitment to 'mutual knowledge', and the context of the public realm indicates a social (spatial) ambition beyond the fixity of the building as object.

When pushed on the point of 'feminism' Liza Fior says: 'calling ourselves muf meant this explicit underscoring of the fact that we aren't pretending to be men, we are not turning up with a sort of neat hairstyle, trying to infer that we're bringing order [...]. By being so overt it was just (that) we knew we were women, we knew we were marginalised because of it, and we weren't going to pretend that we didn't know what was going on. And I think that how it plays itself out now in the work is [...] that there are always two stories at least to every piece of work [...]. It can be called "feminine wiles", or called "duplicity" or "guerrilla tactics" or "strategic sell-out".'[21]

muf's work, including their urban designs, buildings and strategic documents, can be read as a literal translation of Giddens's formulation of agency. Giddens's 'capability of acting otherwise' is echoed by muf's 'each situation is inscribed with the possibility of another'.[22] Processes of planning are left open to include the voices of others; they are, in fact, all about the voices of others. Spatial arrangements and material resolutions are treated as the negotiation of interests that come about through consultation between public and private, communal and individual; often, muf suggests frameworks for action rather than determining specific outcomes. Decisions are guided by intuition, aspirations, rows; methodology comes out of doing and then reflecting at the end of doing. The idea of non-imposition informs all their work, with a continuous deliberation and conversation between process and product, and an implicit questioning of given briefs. A traditional brief acts against the spirit of agency in so much that by setting parameters it tends to close things down and limit options. muf, on the other hand, takes the brief not as a given set of instructions but as an opportunity to open up possibilities.

Episode 2: Obedinenie sovremennykh arkhitektorov (OSA)

The next episode in spatial agency concerns OSA, the 'Union of Contemporary Architects', founded in 1925 in Moscow by Moisei Ginzburg, Leonid, Victor and Aleksandr Vesnin. From the outset OSA attempted to change the modus operandi of the architect by arguing that architectural skills were central to the definition and construction of social questions and new ways of life and living. Through the use of architectural knowledge and expertise the members of OSA advanced the concept of the application of theoretical work to real problems and the notion of the architect as an 'organiser of building'.[23] Their endeavour for new social building typologies, the social condensers, pervades the group's theoretical as well as practical work.

Fig. 2: Narkomfin Housing Project in 1997: Communal eating hall, nursery and launderette in the wing on the left (copyright Florian Kossak)

In 1926, OSA founded the journal *Sovremennaya arkhitektura* [Contemporary Architecture], which was used as a vehicle to promote their views on methods of design, theoretical and operational questions, and the social, economic and national conditions of the Soviet situation. In the first issue of *Sovremennaya arkhitektura*, Ginzburg set out how the development of ideas worked in the 'Functional Method', in which processes 'would be open to scrutiny' both in terms of 'data and decision making, and thus publicly accountable'.[24] Ginzburg saw the aim of contemporary architecture as one where the 'consumer' had a specific contribution to make, where construction was a collective act, it was participatory, and both the public and the specialists would contribute their specific components. Most clearly, and in tune with the idea of agency, he saw the architect's role as to synthesise the different positions without overwhelming them.[25] Speaking about the Narkomfin housing project on Nijinsky Boulevard [fig. 2], Moscow (Ginzburg and Milinis, 1928-1930), Ginzburg stated:

We can no longer compel the occupants of a particular building to live collectively, as we have attempted to do in the past, generally with negative results. We must provide for the possibility of a gradual, natural transition to communal utilisation in a number of different areas. That is why we have tried to keep each unit isolated from the next, that is why we found it necessary to design the kitchen alcove as a standard element: of minimum size that could be removed bodily from the apartment to permit the introduction of canteen catering at any given moment. We considered it absolutely necessary to incorporate certain features that would stimulate the transition to a socially superior mode of life, stimulate but not dictate.[26]

Architecture is here understood as something that works for and with the residents. Especially seen in the context of the time where design, typically, was dictated by either an architect or developer, this approach was something previously unheard of. Ginzburg presents architecture as a discipline that is socially aware, acts with intent but nevertheless acknowledges production as a continuous process.

Episode 3: Santiago Cirugeda
The Spanish architect Santiago Cirugeda and his practice *Recetas Urbanas* [Urban Prescriptions] challenge what it might mean to be and practice as an architect, by questioning and subverting regulations, laws and conventions. In this, his work is about the possibility for action, for appropriation, occupation and use, powered by the imagination of the respective initiator. At the same time, Cirugeda questions the notion that the architect is the author, and thereby the solely recognised designer. On the introduction page to his website, Cirugeda states that all the 'urban prescriptions' displayed on the site are in the public domain and that 'they may be used in all their strategic and juridical proceedings by the citizens' who may want to try them out.[27] He aims to provide people with tools to act in their own city in order to cause a reaction against current institutional regulations, and to demonstrate that institutions cannot limit the complex human realm.

A substantial part of the studio's work so far has tackled those sites in cities that have been left over by demolition, that have been lying empty or have been walled in - unusable for reasons of active neglect, lack of care, or abandonment. The suggested action consists of specific advice as to how to apply to the local council for a permit to install something temporarily; in some cases he provides a detailed manual [fig. 3]. This 'something' is, however, never to be taken literally. In Cirugeda's project 'Public Domain Occupation with Skips', the skip is not meant to be a skip but is meant to be a vehicle for citizens to occupy the urban realm through 'taking the street'. Why would one do this? Because 'this personal and intimate action takes place outside everything politicians and professionals may plan, it follows ways that are labelled by difference, by independence,

Fig. 3: Santiago Cirugeda's Strategies for Subversive Urban Occupation (from left to right and top to bottom): Skips - Taking the street; Scaffolding - Building yourself an urban reserve; Insect House - The tick's stratagem; Puzzle House - The closet stratagem; Housing: Pepe's house - Civil Disobedience (copyright Santiago Cirugeda/Recetas Urbanas)

and it makes obvious that the citizen plays a very important role in the development and construction of the environment he lives in'.[28]

In this, his approach is a good example of how spatial agency is embedded in a temporal continuity, in which the architect acts as catalyst of change for an unspecified period of time. Cirugeda's proposals consist of perpetually redefining global systems (urban planning and legislation), looking for possible loopholes and uncertainties that might empower the various user groups.

Episode 4: The New Architecture Movement

If, as we have argued, spatial agency implicitly critiques the normative foundations of architectural practice, then we might expect to find it manifested most clearly in the groups that have taken an explicitly oppositional stance to the conditions that frame that practice. Exemplary of such opposition are the Architects Revolutionary Council (ARC), the New Architecture Movement (NAM) - which arose out of the more tightly knit ARC - and SLATE, the newsletter of the NAM, which was published between 1977 and 1980 [fig. 4].

ARC, initially funded by the Rowntree Trust, was founded in 1970 and led by Brian Anson who was then a lecturer at the Architectural Association. It remained a small group who were described as 'the *enfant terrible* of the radical architecture groups - variously feared, indulged, despised, and every now and then mocked'.[29] They believed that 'creative architecture should be available to all people in society, regardless of their economic circumstances'.[30] To enact their ideas, ARC members gave advice as 'community architects' on projects in Ealing, Colne Valley, and Bridgetown. At the same time, ARC campaigned for 'revolutionary changes within the architectural establishment and specifically to the replacement of the RIBA by a new architectural system'.[31] Together with NAM they set out to criticise the conventional notions

of professionalism and the internalised structure of the profession, and in particular the system of patronage where the designer of a building has little contact with its user.

Much of this discussion was presented in SLATE, which ran articles on local authority housing, education, women in construction, the Schools of Architecture Council, and features on 'What It Means to Architecture'. SLATE argued that architecture could not be separated from its political implications and social obligations, and that architecture as promulgated by the RIBA, had become an apologia for architects and that it was not accountable to the people who have to live in and with the architects' work.

SLATE ceased publication in 1980, and the ARC and NAM moved into different existences. 'Women in Construction', one of the working groups within NAM, was the starting point for Matrix, one of the first explicitly feminist architecture practices in the UK. However, by the mid 1980s most of the initial energy of these groups had been dissipated, overwhelmed, one suspects, by the ascendant values of the Thatcherite era. That these latter values have now been found to be so bankrupt, so bankrupting, only serves to remind us that the spirit they vanquished is as important as ever. In the case of NAM and the others mentioned here, the unapologetic critique of professional norms and the political structures that shape those norms is as relevant now as it was then.

Towards spatial agency

You might be wondering by now if these examples from the margins can really have any relevance to the way that we might develop a theory of spatial agency.

OSA, fine, but was it not merely a short-lived episode? And NAM? They also only existed for a few years and was it not their overtly oppositional
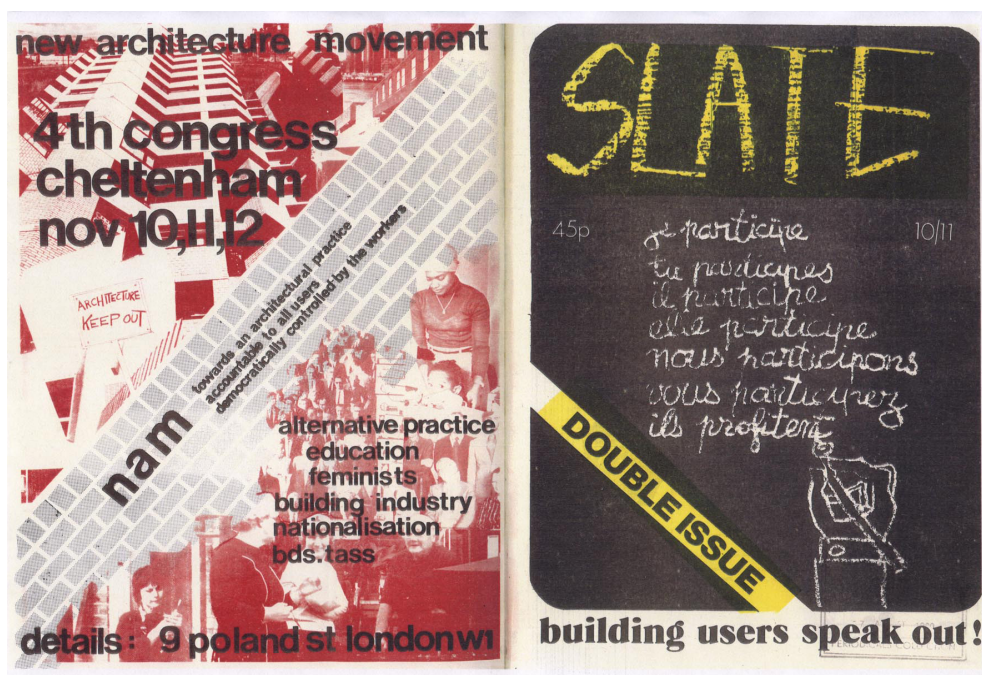
Fig. 4: Back cover of issue 9 and front cover of issue 10/11 of SLATE, the newsletter of the New Architecture Movement (copyright SLATE)

stance destined to end up in a dialectical wrangle, grappling with but never overturning the conditions they addressed? And muf? They even aver from using the 'f' word because it would confine them to a singular mode of operation. And Cirugeda? A one-off maverick and surely not relevant for any serious discourse on the future of architecture.

Well, yes and no. There is a danger that the discursive overwhelms the practical and there is a danger of making things more significant than they are. Yet, these episodes show instances where architects are not reduced to expeditors of the processes of construction, and where their skills are not simply instrumentalised. Instead they provide instances where an architect's knowledge and skills are used transformatively. OSA, NAM, Cirugeda and muf show us how architects can transform themselves into something other than being the deliverers of buildings on the back of so-called expert knowledge. In all these cases, the architects exceed the reductive sense of agency as mere exchange of service, and enter into a more open-ended and expansive sense of the word. That so much architectural production is predicated on the understanding that the only thing that architects do is design and deliver buildings, is a limit that these practices challenge. It is a limit that lies in the fixity, and subsequent commodification, of the building as object, against which spatial agency opens up a much more dynamic continuity, in which architectural know-how can be deployed in multiple ways and on multiple contexts that exceed, but of course do not exclude, the design of buildings.

These practices also challenge any notion that they are marginal. If the centre is found wanting, it no longer has the right or power to define (and thereby suppress) the margins. If, as bell hooks asserts, there is latent strength in the margins which are spaces of 'radical openness',[32] then now is the time for that strength to be released, not so much to confront the centre (why attack the already vanquished?) but to empower those people and spaces that have been so let down by the centre.

The question therefore remains as to how to operate transformatively in a context still dominated by the capitalist production of space. The answer may lie in the deployment of spatial agency as outlined above. Set as it is within a long-term social context, spatial agency exceeds the short-term limits of economic imperatives and their accompanying spatial control. Acting for and on behalf of others, spatial agency necessarily provides a planning process that is equal and open to anyone. But to achieve this we need a twofold shift, not just on the side of the architectural profession but also in those who commission architecture: on the one hand an explicit call for architects to face up to their political and ethical responsibility, on the other hand a call for all those involved in the production of the built environment to engage with the precepts of spatial agency. If agency 'presumes the capability of acting otherwise', then the state and communities have to think beyond the bureaucratised rules that control so much public life, and instead act as responsible clients and desiring users, responsible that is to all stages of the production of the built environment, and thus intolerant to (among other things) the exploitation of building labour and to restrictions on access to public space.

Critique is clearly important: one has to be critical in order to understand the structures in order to be able to understand how to transform them. But critique alone is not enough, as the circling arguments of US architectural theorists all too clearly show.[33] Critique has to be combined with action, in an acknowledgement that it actually is possible to make a difference within the wider intellectual and political context. This is where spatial agency's transformative combination of the discursive and the practical comes to the fore. We should refuse the portrayal of architects as powerless victims of the process of building production and other global forces, and instead become our own AGENTS of

progressive politics.

All this might read as hopeful, maybe even hope-less, rhetoric but for one crushing imperative - the need to address the environmental crisis the world faces, especially in the form exacerbated by the neoliberal policies of the recent Bush presidency. Here spatial agency as an active force has a central role. Against the market-led regimes that promise (but can never deliver) technocratic fixes to prob-lems created by technocratic behaviour, agency addresses the social and political constitution of the environmentally degraded condition we find ourselves in. Here is one area in which architects can claim a useful role as agents of change, not through the opportunist deployment of technical gadgetry but through a critique and subsequent transformation of the conditions - social, spatial, political - that have led us into the plight we are in. All this appears more urgent to us as a task for architectural theory and practice to address, than skirmishes and discourses around 'post' this or that.

Katherine Heron said more than thirty years ago that 'architects have to work from a political base, and if there isn't one, you have to start it'.[34] We'd better get on with it.

Notes

1. Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Facade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth Century America* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1993), p. 5.
2. Gloria Steinem quoted in Marilyn Barrett, *The 10 Biggest Legal Mistakes Women Can Avoid: How to Protect Yourself, Your Children, and Your Assets* (VA: Capital Books, 2000), p. 221.
3. Sociologists tend towards one of two versions of agency. In the first, agency describes the capability of someone to act independently of the constraining struc-tures of society. In the second, transformative sense, agency refers to action that makes a difference. Thus Anthony Giddens writes: '[Agency] means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such inter-vention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to deploy a range of causal powers, includ-ing that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends on the capability of the individual to "make a difference" to a pre-existing state of affairs of course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to "make a difference", that is to exercise some sort of power.' Anthony Giddens, *The Constitu-tion of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1984), p. 14. It is this second sense of agency that we use throughout this essay.
4. Michel Foucault points out that one cannot become an author by writing any old thing - a letter, for example. 'The Author' is a cultural construction. Equally, as Roland Barthes argues, the author is seen to be a special kind of person: the apparently settled, whole, rational self which post-structuralism has sought to undermine. 'Author', significantly, is etymologically linked to authority, authorise, authoritarian, etcetera.
5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Black-well, 1993), p. 32.
6. Comment made by Rem Koolhaas during a discussion forum, and published in Cynthia Davidson, *Anyplace* (New York: Anyone Corporation / Cambridge, Mass. & London: MIT Press, 1995), p. 234. The full quote is: 'One of the underlying aspects of this conversation, which for me is an inheritance of the climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, is the basic assumption that regardless of our respective positions, the only respectable position is a critical position. That distorts the whole discussion because no matter how critical we are about society or our profession, it is impossible to make a creative statement that is based purely on criticism. There has to be a component of adhesion or reinforcement or complete identification. I find it ambig-uous, if not hypocritical, that we all pretend to discuss something that we want to maintain a certain neat and moralistic distance from. In fact, some of our most interesting engagements are uncritical, empathetic,

and very risky. My problem with this reigning discourse of architecture and architectural criticism is its inability to recognise that in the deepest motivation of architecture there is something that cannot be critical. In other words, to deal with the sometimes insane difficulty of an architectural project, to deal with the incredible accumulation of economic, cultural, political, and logistical issues, requires an engagement for which we use a conventional word - complicity - but for which I am honest enough to substitute the word engagement or adhesion.'

7. As is well documented, the Frankfurt School has neither a single message nor stable trajectory, but it may be seen that there is a shift from the early 'emancipatory' thrust: 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 244.) to a more determinedly oppositional turn, the latter typified by Adorno's 'Negative Dialectic' (Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 1973)).

8. First introduced in 1976, Giddens's definition of agency was a central plank of his theory of structuration: 'The basic shortcoming of most discussions of agency and structure [...] is to suppose that either the individual has a primacy over society (modes of production/social formation) or the reverse [...]. We should resist this dualism and instead understand it as a duality - the "duality of structure".' Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), p. 220. See also: Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, especially chapter one.

9. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, p. 216.

10. 'The world as constituted by a stream of events-in-process independent of the agent does not hold out a predetermined future'. Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p. 75.

11. Ibid., p. 76.

12. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, p. 4.

13. Ibid., p. 4.

14. 'There are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen!' Bruno Latour, 'On recalling ANT', in *Actor Network Theory and After*, ed. by John Law and John Hassard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 15.

15. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, p. 9. See also the section 'Agency and Power', pp. 14ff.

16. There is a long list of social geographers who have analysed the intersection of neoliberal forces and the production of the built environment. See in particular Neil Smith, *Uneven Development* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and *Spaces of Neoliberalism*, ed. by Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). It is telling how few of these arguments have been transferred over more directly into the architectural arena, but Mike Davis's work stands out here.

17. Jonathan Charley, 'The Glimmer of Other Worlds: questions on alternative practice', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 12, 2 (2008), pp. 159-71 (p. 160).

18. Ibid., p. 165.

19. http://www.muf.co.uk/index.htm [accessed 9 December 2008]. For the story of muf see: Katherine Shonfield and Muf, *This Is What We Do: A Muf Manual* (London: Ellipsis, 2001).

20. Interview with Liza Fior, founding partner of muf, conducted by Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, 27 February 2006, muf offices, London.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. The term 'organiser of building' was used by Nikolai Ladovskii who was part of the group ASNOVA. Catherine Cooke explicates how Ginzburg and the Vesnin brothers formed OSA to address outdated and passive professionalism and this new understanding of architecture as expressed by Ladovskii: Catherine Cooke, 'Form Is a Function X: The Development of the Constructivist Architect's Design Method', in *Russian Avant-Garde: Art and Architecture* (London: Academy Editions and Architectural Design, 1983), pp. 34-49 (p. 40).

24. Ibid., p. 41.

25. Ibid., p. 41.

26. Selim O. Chan-Magomedow, *Pioniere Der Sowjetischen Architektur: Der Weg zur neuen sowjetischen Architek-*

    tur in den zwanziger und zu Beginn der dreißiger Jahre
    (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1983), pp. 344ff.

27. http://www.recetasurbanas.net/index_eng.php
    [accessed 23 January 2008].

28. http://www.recetasurbanas.net/ref_a/a1/a1_eng.php
    [accessed 23 January 2008].

29. Anne Karpf, 'The Pressure Groups', *Architects' Journal*,
    42 (1977), pp. 728-34 (p. 730).

30. Ibid., p. 731.

31. Ibid., p. 731. RIBA stands for Royal Institute of British
    Architects.

32. bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical
    Openness', in *Women, Knowledge and Reality*, ed. by
    Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (London: Routledge,
    1996), pp. 48-56.

33. For an excellent summary of the US-centric nature of
    architectural discourse see George Baird, '"Criticality"
    and Its Discontents', *Harvard Design Review*, 21 (Fall
    2004/Winter 2005), pp. 1-6.

34. Katherine Heron, 'The Mudshute', *Architects' Journal*,
    166 (1977), pp. 742-43 (p. 743).

Acknowledgements

Biography

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