

Luca Serafini, Scott Lash

# Cultural Studies and Cultural Sociology. Scott Lash in Conversation with Luca Serafini

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# Cultural Studies and Cultural Sociology.

## Scott Lash in Conversation with Luca Serafini.

by Luca Serafini *and* Scott Lash

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### 1. Introduction

Cultural sociology is different from the sociology of culture. The latter often reduces culture to a “dependent variable” with society as the “independent variable.” Cultural sociology instead views society as already cultural; indeed, the social is in very significant ways culturally constituted. In this sense, cultural sociology shares many important attributes with cultural studies. The discipline of cultural studies – whose founding is generally associated with the creation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964 – initially focused on analyzing the links between culture and power in the working class and in the youth and ethnic sub-cultures. However, especially starting in the 1970s, cultural studies subsequently began to embrace continental philosophy, first in the discipline of comparative literature, drawing its inspiration primarily from Jacques Derrida and tracing its lineage back to Frederic Jameson, among others. At the same time, the work of Michel Foucault was meeting with widespread reception outside of France. In the Twenty-First century, there has been a movement away from the textual emphasis of comparative literature and the focus has shifted to the image and the object in media theory and the art world. The inspiration in this current of thought has derived more from Gilles Deleuze. Now in the context of the refugee crisis, the work of Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito has come to the fore.

If the first generation of cultural studies had its home in Birmingham, a second generation has had a vital base at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Scott Lash belongs to this “second generation,” which has been in dialogue with practitioners in the media and art worlds, who are much more influenced by continental thought. Lash is at the same time very much a social and cultural theorist. Cultural sociology, as again distinct from the sociology of culture, has strong social-theoretical foundations. According to Jeffrey Alexander, cultural sociology has been directed towards “emotionally charged” social action, thus rejecting the limitations implicit in the assumptions of a conscious, rational and voluntary behavior that is central to more mainstream sociology. By introducing social processes into a meaningful “affective” horizon, cultural sociology gives primacy to the cultural sphere and brings questions of the symbol to the forefront. From this perspective, Alexander himself views a certain form of cultural studies as being implicit in Durkheimian sociology, starting with the centrality of the symbol and of systems and networks of symbols to Durkheim’s work on elementary forms of religious life. For Alexander, the adjective “cultural” found in both cultural studies and cultural sociology refers far more to a sociology of symbolic processes. For Lash, cultural studies as it is practiced at Goldsmiths College is perhaps just as much or more a question of engagement with images, with objects and with the aforementioned paradigms in continental thought.

## 2. Conversation

**Luca Serafini:** Professor Lash, let’s start by working on this cultural studies versus cultural sociology *Methodenstreit*. A great deal of cultural studies is philosophically infused. You started as a psychology student at the University of Michigan, and later you moved to sociology, a field in which you obtained your MA and, later on, your PhD at the London School of Economics. Therefore, although moving in disciplines allied to philosophy, your academic path never directly encountered this field of studies. So, where does your theoretical interest in philosophy come from?

**Scott Lash:** Actually, the origin of my interest in philosophy can be found in the course of my studies, even though, in a way, it was an “existential” rather than an “institutional” encounter, that is, not completely related to the academic milieu. When I was a student in psychology at the University of Michigan, I stumbled onto some works of existential psychology, in particular the theories of Ludwig Binswanger, who developed his psychoanalytical project starting especially from Martin Heidegger’s philosophy. I suppose I was having my own existential issues at that time and by more or less accident became friends with a Methodist minister whose church was near

my residences. He put me onto to Rollo May, a Methodist and a bit of a Christian existentialist thinker, author of *Existence* [1958], who was in some ways of a piece with Niebuhr and Tillich, other Christian existentialists. I read May as existential psychology and in the same context Binswanger's books excited me, and from there I began to study Sartre's philosophy and, many years later, Heidegger. More recently, after many years of immersion in continental thought I started teaching Kierkegaard. Obviously, my university experience also played a part: as a psychology student, I read Gestalt psychology books that I found extremely interesting. However, I have to say that it was especially Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's philosophy that fascinated me. I was surely far from understanding everything I read, but just my desire for a deeper comprehension was the spur that made me learn more and more.

**LS:** This, then, led you to apply the most varied philosophical theories to your social research and cultural studies. Among the references that you used the most, in fact, there are not only theorists who are commonly used in social sciences, like, for instance, Habermas, but also authors who, generally, sociology tends to see as extraneous to its field. Kant, for instance, is a figure that continually resurfaces in your work, especially in relation to that model of aesthetic reflexivity that you connect to his third critique, and that runs along your entire theoretical path. But can we really apply, as you did, Kant's aesthetics to books that deal with the post-industrial society in Germany and Japan? And, more generally, how exactly are your more specifically philosophical theories connected to your analyses of society?

**SL:** You used a verb that leaves me rather puzzled, namely, "to apply." This verb makes you think that there is a universal mold, a model, and that, at a certain point, you can find a social fact that you can fit in that model. Instead, I believe that the process takes place in exactly the contrary way. There is a particular, a fact, a social phenomenon, and the universal, philosophical, and theoretical abstraction emerges from that particular. In other words, philosophy emerges from social processes, not vice versa. I believe that it is just this need to better understand the particular that pushed me, here in an almost natural way, to be that type of sociologist who takes philosophical issues very seriously, just because it was in philosophy that I would find the answer to the appearance of the notion of universal in my studies, even in the most empirical ones.

Even in *Economies of Signs and Space* [Lash & Urry 1994], the term "economy" refers most of all to the cultural, symbolic, affective sphere. And it is not by chance that I got the idea for the title from a philosophical text that uses the notion of "economy" in a similar way: *Économie Libidinale* [1974] by Jean-François Lyotard.

Getting to the heart of your question, I believe that philosophy goes far deeper on certain issues than social sciences do. Sociology too, wonders about subjects such

as aesthetics, judgment, and so on, but at a more superficial level. At present, for instance, I am trying to write a book on the notion of experience [*Experience: New Foundations for the Human Sciences*]. Sociology talks about experience usually in relation to specific categories: women's experience, working class experience, but it has never questioned what experience is. It is clear that, by posing a question of this type, I could be accused of moving outside of sociology and ending up in pure speculation. However, in investigating the notion of experience, my starting point is never the Kantian point of the conditions of possibility of experience itself. I start from a perspective that I would call almost psychological. I ask myself: how does experience happen? Where can it be drawn from? What I am interested in, it is never the *a priori*, but the *a posteriori*. As we were saying before, one always starts from the particular. We could say the same thing, still referring to Kant, about judgment. When I am doing a research that includes this subject, I never wonder what the conditions of possibility of judgment are in general, but what the reality of empirical judgment is. I start from there, and that leads me to a more abstract level. That's why I believe that my wish to go beyond sociological analysis does not determine an abandonment of sociology, but only an approach to this discipline from a different angle.

**LS:** Can we say that, in the end, this is a cultural studies methodology? Could you explain to us how cultural studies, as a combination of various disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy, media studies and sociology, is different from each one of them taken individually?

**SL:** Sure, my method is consistent with that of cultural studies, because here we do start from the particular, not from the universal. Cultural studies is in this way, unlike probably most of sociology – one important exception is phenomenology – anti-positivist. In many disciplines, anthropology, media studies, politics, a positivist approach still prevails. It is a thing that I noticed also when I was teaching in China, where I did indeed hold courses in some of those departments. However, I must say that, in the last few years, I noticed a “softening” of the scientific approach even in that country. Continental thought has eked out a little space in all these disciplines.

First-generation cultural studies, associated with Stuart Hall and Birmingham were not welcoming to philosophical thought. But at the same time there were other moves in cultural studies broadly conceived that were steeped in continental philosophy. In Britain there was the group featuring Stephen Heath around screen, whose inspiration was Lacanian. Then there was the whole comparative literature tradition in the United States, especially driven by Yale and oriented around the reception of Derrida and deconstruction. Another dimension from comparative literature that was driven by Fredric Jameson brought in Foucault and Deleuze, and now Negri and Hardt.

Even in the sectors of media theory, of creative media, obviously very rich with elements that mix with researches on new media, we find an increasing number of approaches that cannot be called positivist at all and have very strong ties with the practices, with the arts. This applies also to the work at Goldsmiths. Here Luciana Parisi, with a PhD in philosophy in Warwick, does research in cybernetics and biotechnologies. Also Matthew Fuller, whose work on media, software and new technologies includes the analysis of artistic projects of different types, connected to information and video surveillance systems, in which he draws on Deleuze, Guattari and Nietzsche. The Goldsmiths Centre thus connects a philosophically imbued cultural studies to practical works in media, design, architecture and art. Stuart Hall himself had indeed a strong interest in the arts and worked closely with black and “Third-World” artists in his role as a founder of London’s INIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts).

**LS:** Can we say that this connection with the arts and practices is, after all, more characteristic of the British tradition of cultural studies, while the American one starts and develops more in relation to comparative literature?

**SL:** This is certainly true from a historical point of view, and the difference of traditions is still making British and American cultural studies partially different from each other. I would say that American cultural studies are more focused on literary texts, while British cultural studies give more importance to images and things. Nevertheless, it is important to stress how, actually, even in England, cultural studies was born from studies in literature, in the work, say, of Richard Hoggart, who was Goldsmiths’ director. Here there was a basis in working-class culture. Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* was published in 1957. Now almost sixty years later, research has shifted to biopolitics, digital media, technics, and questions of the post-human.

**LS:** We have spoken thus of a cultural studies as an anti-positivist research program with practical as well as scholarly outputs. In such a context I wondered if we could talk about cultural sociology, and in particular how cultural studies and cultural sociology differ from one another. Jeffrey Alexander once argued that cultural studies already was sociological, in that a number of its basic issues were addressed long ago by Emile Durkheim and subsequently by the Durkheimian tradition. But do you think the difference between the two fields is that cultural sociology – even if it addresses cultural phenomena – remains within the boundaries of sociology, while cultural studies goes beyond these boundaries, at the risk of being mistaken for pure philosophy?

**SL:** Basically, I would say that cultural studies, even when focused on social theory, recasts it as cultural theory rather than sociology in the strict sense. Take the editorial board of *Theory, Culture and Society*: only two or maybe three members can

be considered sociologists, something that certainly could not happen in a journal of cultural sociology. Yet cultural sociology is quite different from the sociology of culture, something I think *The American Journal of Cultural Sociology* is quite aware of. The sociology of culture, as it were, wants to use the social to explain the cultural. It looks at the social bases or social determinations of culture, almost like independent and dependent variables, and in this sense is more or less fundamentally positivist. Cultural sociology is different. It seems to me that it has as fundamental references Durkheim and also Marcel Mauss. It is true that at points Durkheim identified with positivism, but what has most influenced cultural sociology is his notion of the sacred, rituals and the symbolic. We see this in Mauss's gift. The gift is a form of symbolic exchange that is far different from more positivist notions of social action that we see in Weber's *Zweckrationality*, in some of Parsons' work and even in Marx's *Capital*. In Chinese the word for gift is *liwu*

(礼物)

, in which *li* is ritual and *wu* is thing, thus a "ritual-thing." A gift is a ritual thing, and this takes us back to the sacred and ritual in Durkheim. It is as if in producing, reproducing and continuously reworking the symbolic, the exchange of gifts allows us to enter into a social context where symbolic exchange is more fundamental than material exchange, where the gift is prior to the commodity, where the commodity is a derivative of the gift. This is for me the lines of the frame of cultural sociology. It starts with ritual, the sacred, the symbol and symbolic activity as the context in which social processes take place. So, it is not a matter of determining the cultural scope starting from the social one, like in the sociology of culture, but of making sociology starting from cultural models. This would be a frame in which I would understand Alexander's work on, for example, performance or trauma.

In contrast, cultural studies will have reference not so much to Durkheim and Mauss, who are a sociologist and an anthropologist, but instead to Foucault, Deleuze, and say Agamben or Negri, who are philosophers. But this doesn't mean that cultural studies is not in touch with cultural processes, and by extension, the symbolic. I previously mentioned Durkheim and the connection between the sacred and ritual. Cultural studies thinkers such as Francois Jullien and, more modestly, myself work through a Durkheimian frame to look at Chinese society and culture in relation with Confucianism and Taoism.

**LS:** A potential paradox could arise from what you have said so far: you describe cultural studies as starting from the particular, yet also having continental philosophy as its main theoretical point of reference. Many people tend to associate sociology

with the empirical and philosophy with the abstract, yet you seem to be saying the opposite.

**SL:** Let me make a distinction between “empiricism” and “positivism.” Both of these can deal with the empirical, with facts, with concrete phenomena. What I am saying is that cultural studies tends to muse a more “empiricist” approach, and sociology a more positivist approach. Empiricists, with Hume, start from sense data and work towards the general. While positivism’s sources are in Descartes and rationalism where you start from the axiom, the universal and then apply it to the empirical. Most of sociology seems to me in the aforementioned positivist mode. Thus you are meant to state your hypotheses, or have research questions ready to apply to material, rather than engaging with the particular and letting the questions flow from there. The type of cultural theory that, instead, is the focus of cultural studies, and that, in many cases, has a philosophical basis, tends to consider the detail first, and only at that point, it begins to think about the general. It is a sort “phenomenology,” because it takes the phenomenon as a starting point, and, after that, works towards the conceptual generalization. Conversely, sociology operates on increasingly positivistic models, which need a stronger theoretical and conceptual basis. This applies also to what we have defined as the privileged theoretical references of cultural sociology. Durkheim also has his positivistic aspect, especially when he moves into the realm of the profane in, for example, his sociological epistemology. There is in Durkheim a lot of what I would call a “methodological Neo-Kantianism.” With this expression, I refer to the fact that Durkheim’s “primitive classifications” evolve to become the universals of the Kantian categories. The implication is a social research based on axioms, theories, hypotheses. In this context we can understand Durkheim’s critique of British empiricist (i.e., not positivist) anthropology in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* [1912]. Empiricism as in Hume and Smith have always had a strong notion of the image and implicitly the imagination or imaginary. For Hume we can perceive what is here and now. We can only imagine past and future sense impressions. In this sense Durkheim criticizes the predominance of the image (as distinct from the symbol) in British empiricist anthropologists, who associate it with the importance of dreaming. For Durkheim, focusing on dreams means privileging the individual, while the symbolic is a question not of individuals but the basis of society as a whole. Why is this so important for Durkheim? For the simple reason that the fundamental question of his research is of the universal type, namely: how is society possible? It is the sociological version of Kant’s question: how is knowledge possible? In both cases, the reference is to the conditions of possibility *a priori* of the particular. The image and the particular work in the register not of the *a priori* but instead of the *a posteriori*. This *a priori* thinking is for Hume metaphysical, as is the notion of cause.



Kant admits that this is the case. Hence, the Durkheimian notion of symbolic, from this point of view, is strongly Neo-Kantian. Thus positivist sociology focuses on causation while a more phenomenological mode will focus not on the why but the how of social (and cultural) life.

Certainly, cultural studies is far more empiricist: that is, it believes that the “whole,” the “entire,” is something unstable and, as such, undefinable and subject to investigation. In this sense Ulrich Beck had many affinities with cultural studies. Indeed, he always maintained that knowledge, in itself, is uncertain, and focused on what he called the “unattended consequences” of individual and collective action. His concept of reflexivity is also enlightening in this sense, because it is in some way referred to Kant, but to the “empirical” Kant, not the apodictic one, namely, the one who elaborated the notion of reflexive judgment. In this type of judgment, we don’t look for a general rule, a category of predication, but we look at a specific event, and later we try to extrapolate a rule that suits that event. But the rule can be anywhere, and it is not defined prior to the event. Again, we can see Beck’s “empiricism” in his “risk society” namely a society deprived of any cognitive and apodictic certainties and exposed to the unforeseeability of situations. So I would say that cultural sociology works more in an *a priori* register, and thus has some affinities with positivism, while cultural studies works more in an *a posteriori* vein.

**LS:** What you said leads me to insist on this point. We have talked about the use that cultural studies make of philosophy, how philosophy can be useful to shed light on social processes. Cultural sociology, which you associate with the subject of the symbolic, remains sociology in the strict sense, but, certainly, the notion of the symbolic can trespass into the field of sociology and take on strong philosophical features. Let us not forget that authors like Bataille and Derrida used Mauss’s theories of the gift, although interpreted in a different way. Perhaps for this reason, too, as you mentioned, it is the reflection on the symbolic that establishes the strongest connection between cultural studies and cultural sociology. I wondered if you could mention a theorist, in philosophy or cultural studies, whose use of the notion of the symbolic also makes sense to cultural sociology.

**SL:** I guess I could give you more than one name, but, in relation to your question, I would undoubtedly say Roberto Esposito. Indeed, it is odd how we find, in the work of this important Italian philosopher, some of the fundamental issues of cultural sociology as we have defined it so far. Esposito talks about community, highlighting the etymological root of the term, *munus*, a word that means at the same time debt, lack and gift intended as something that must be given to the other. For Esposito, thus, *communitas* becomes the alternative to the *immunitas*, that is, to a paradigm of closed subjectivity, “immunized” against the alien, the other. The term *munus* em-

phases the obligatory nature of the gift, something that does not refer to Bataille and Derrida, but directly to Mauss. For Mauss the symbolic universe activated by the gift is precisely tied to its obligatoriness. At stake are the obligatory nature of both gift and counter-gift. This symbolic universe is also to Esposito paramount to build positive forms of community. Further, for Esposito, the gift is connected to an open subjectivity, in part a void which is what opens him or her to the other. This is a subjectivity at one with authors like Arnold Gehlen and Peter Bürger, that is with “philosophical anthropology,” who view the human in terms of an *Instinktarmut*, a poverty of instincts, in other words a lack or void. Thus perhaps Esposito’s work is potentially a bridge between philosophy, cultural theory and cultural sociology.

**LS:** Talking about cultural studies as a non-positivist social research, you previously referred to the connection existing in this field between theoretical research and practices. Could you better explain what you mean by the term “practices?”

**SL:** When I talk about practices, I mostly refer to “technics”: architecture, arts, design, software writing are such technics. Aristotle contrasted the technics of making with the *episteme* of theory and *praxis* of politics. Here I am influenced by Bernard Stiegler’s work *Technics and Time* [1994] which brought to the heart of the cultural debate the problem of technics and the need to reintegrate them in a philosophical knowledge. When I talk about techniques, I tend to distinguish them from praxis in the strict sense, although both are clearly connected, as it happens, for instance, in the work of another Italian philosopher, Paolo Virno.

**LS:** If this is the meaning you give to the word technics or “technique,” how would you define the notion of “culture?”

**SL:** It’s been about twenty years, that is, starting from the publication of my essay in the volume *Reflexive Modernization* [1994], that the term culture has meant “forms of life” to me. This is a notion that, in *Reflexive Modernization*, I mainly connected to Pierre Bourdieu’s work and to his model of *habitus*, that is, to the pre-reflexive patterns that the individual has in relation to his milieu, the concreteness of life relationships in his community. It is an almost communitarian view that, however, does not want to reach the philosophical outcomes of communitarianism, but recognizes in the latter the recovery of a dimension of “groundedness” of the subjects, their rooting in contexts and in relation to forms of life. It is a point of view that “postmodern ethics” tends too often to forget, privileging the absolute ethical relation between disembodied subjects outside any concrete context, in, say, Lévinas and Bauman. “Forms of life” are at stake in the late Wittgenstein and a certain phenomenology. I am not talking of Husserl’s phenomenology, the one more specifically philosophical, but of the sociological phenomenology, whose research starts from empirical questions, that for example ethnomethodology has addressed. We see

this also in authors like Francisco Varela and his *Embodied Mind* [1991]. Varela's phenomenology (which has with Mastrana highly influenced Niklas Luhmann) also starts from forms of life, not from transcendental reduction.

What Husserl along with William James and Wilhelm Dilthey have in common is that they conceive experience the same way, that is, in regard to a primordial experience prior to the split of subject and object. Instead, my perspective does not consider the existence of a primordial experience, since experience is always a raw empirical experience. From this point of view, I am close to Hume's perspective, and it is also in this sense that I interpret the notion of forms of life, which are empirical, not primordial. By the same token, I believe that the notion of subjectivity is very different from the notion of subject: subjectivity is prior to the bifurcation of subject and object. This is in line with the aesthetic subjectivity of Kant's third critique. But we do not want to see this in terms of an *a priori* but instead as empirical.

**LS:** So, talking about culture in relation to forms of life means that social research, even the most philosophical sort, should start from there?

**SL:** Cultural studies, as we have developed it at Goldsmiths, starts from the encounter between technics and forms of life. This applies to research and teaching – thus the role at Goldsmiths of Graham Harwood, an important figure in conceptual (media) art. Graham organizes labs where the students work together in small groups that include architects, designers, and artists, with projects connected to the world of new media. In these the work of coders, artists, designers and theorists can inform one another. In such practice-connected teaching we again start from the particular and work toward thinking through, say, notions of space and time; we do not start by formulating general ideas on what space and time are.

I am following this method also in my studies on rural reconstruction in China. One of the persons who, at political level, are busy in implementing these projects is the general secretary of the county level section of the Communist party. Personally, I don't believe he would call himself a true communist, but he is surely an anti-capitalist. In any case, he was extremely interested in the notion of "commons" we are using in the research from a cultural and philosophical, and not only economic, point of view. He wanted to understand the cultural perspectives on community, and take them into account in implementing policies. He asked me to send him my books, obviously translated into Chinese. We are talking of a high-rank local administrator, a prominent figure of what we could call a county government. His interest in culture is not an abstract interest, but it is closely connected to the quotidian reality of his political work and with what, as a politician, he would like to do, not only in the short term, but also in the long one, and I believe that the cultural perspective helps, especially in the second case.

**LS:** This leads me to my last question that I believe is important when we talk about culture in relation to life, to its concrete aspect, namely that of the power of transformation inherent in culture itself. The example of the general secretary in China is certainly interesting, but, broadening our view a little, can we actually say that cultural studies has been able to influence political and social processes on a concrete level?

**SL:** For a good part of this interview we have talked about a universal that emerges from the particular. Well, if we take the discourse to a political level, I believe that it is still necessary to go a little further. Not only is the universal not the starting point, neither is it the point of arrival, meaning that, basically, there is no universal. This may sound like a radical form of anarchism, but let me explain it better. There are no universals because it is the very detail that goes beyond itself, ceases being a mere detail and acquires instead a broader meaning. Take, for example, the *Occupy Movement*, on Wall Street, Hong Kong and elsewhere. In *Occupy* the whole point was not to formulate demands, but to let the goals grow out from the movement. *Occupy* is in this sense a question of means without ends, a politics of means without ends. There is no end of, say, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The politics emerges from the forms of life on the ground. Here in Kant there is the first critique that incorporates in itself a logic of means to an end; the second critique which is about final ends or *Endzweck*. And the third critique featuring *Zweckmagssigkeit* or *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*, finality without end, or the absence of external purposes to which Giorgio Agamben refers when he talks of “means without ends.”

Agamben draws here on Benjamin’s *Critique of Violence* [1921], his most anarchist text that starts itself from Sorel’s *Reflexions sur la violence* [1908]. Here Benjamin argues for justice against law: against both the means-to-an-end and instrumental reason of legal positivism and also the final end of natural law. Instead he opts for justice, which he understands as a politics of divine violence, of neither means to an end nor final ends, but of means without ends. Occupy’s politics are such means without ends. Another way to understand this is in terms of Hardt and Negri’s reading of Marx. Here they talk of formal and real subsumption of labor by capital. In this, capital is the universal and labor the particular. What I think Benjamin wants to give us is neither formal subsumption nor real subsumption, but no subsumption at all. That there is no subsumption of the particular by the universal, but just the relations of particular to particular. Or, as in Hume’s imaginary, a succession of particulars without a universal.

Back to your question, in my opinion, all this leads to politics as a concrete horizon of hope, and not as abstract utopia. We were saying before that culture influences politics in a long-term perspective. It is certainly so, because it is hard to

think of a direct and immediate influence. But if we mean culture in the empirical terms of forms of life, this is not even separated from praxis, but introduces the notion of hope in the future as a concrete and reachable horizon. That is, it can influence the way in which people see things and their desire to change them, but in a non-utopian perspective. Surely, at the heart of it, we find the Kantian “what can I hope?” and not the “what should I do?” or the “what can I know?” If the “what should I do” is ethical then the “what can I hope” is political. Here culture is in a more direct contact with the political than the ethical dimension. This “what can I hope?” is not just utopian. It can start from the empirical fact, to a technics of “what can I make?” or “what can I build?” We spoke above about *munus*, community, the common or commons. In this sense also the common does not come from a blueprint, but from praxis, becomes something that praxis teaches us to build. My research on rural reconstruction in China is about such a political and ecological common. But we see the same sort of phenomena today in so many places, in for example Italy and the many current projects on urban and organic agriculture in the so-called *Cascine* [farmsteads], some of them promoted by Expo 2015. And, still talking about China, we can notice the bond between future horizons, reflection and making, also in architecture. In China there are some 200 rural reconstruction projects, all of them in the direction of an ecological common, and many of them incorporating artists and architects. In many cases the projects are literally about reconfiguring spaces, both for work and residence. A sort of Nineteenth-century utopian socialism, but not at all utopian in the substance. These rural reconstruction projects, these processes grow out of villagers’ concrete experience. Here the technics and politics and the philosophy follow from experience.

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## **Cultural Studies and Cultural Sociology.**

### **Scott Lash in Conversation with Luca Serafini.**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this conversation is to analyse the bond between Cultural Studies and social research, and define analogies and differences between Cultural Studies and Cultural Sociology. Scott Lash, a cultural theorist strongly influenced by philosophical thought, clarifies how the latter can rightfully be part of a social research oriented towards forms of life and practices, as well as towards a concrete, and not utopian, political commitment. The American scholar thoroughly investigates also the notion of "symbolic" in the field of Cultural Sociology, clarifying how it can interact with the speculative models of Cultural Studies.

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