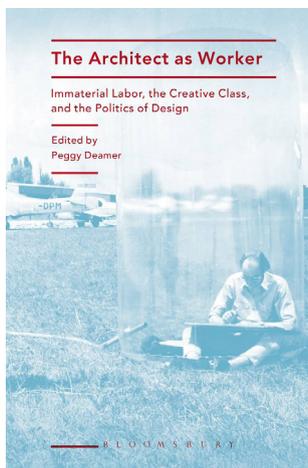


review / MICHAEL DAVIS

Peggy Deamer (Ed.) *The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class and the Politics of Design*

London: New Delhi: Bloomsbury.



The latest published offering by Peggy Deamer, architect, Yale University professor, and occasional resident and teacher here in New Zealand is *The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class and the Politics of Design*. As editor, Deamer has gathered a range of authors, including architects, non-architects, professionals, and academics to reconsider the manner in which architecture is practiced from the position of the actual work involved.

In her introduction, Deamer argues that there are few authors who have addressed the issue of architectural labor. She sets the book directly in relation to those who she considers have previously, including Manfredo Tafuri and Kenneth Frampton, and to contemporary thinkers like K. Michael Hays, Reinhold Martin, and Richard Sennett. Missing, as she argues, is a necessary examination of “architecture’s peculiar status of material embodiment produced by its immaterial work, work that is at once very personal and yet entirely social” (2015: xxxi).

The Architect as Worker consolidates Deamer’s research at Yale University in the wake of the slow-to-fade effects of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. It also extends thinking explored in her earlier *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013), and it provides an expanded context for her and Phillip Bernstein’s *Building (in) the Future: Recasting Labor in Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).

The book transcends geographical boundaries and will find relevance anywhere global capital and architecture coincide. While directed toward architects, it presents ideas that have implications for the creative disciplines more generally.

The essays are arranged in five parts that progress from discussions of the work of design (that might strike a chord with a range of designers) through to examinations of some of the peculiarities of architectural practice (that may be more pertinent to architects). Part I, “The Commodification of Design Labor”, discusses immaterial labour and its treatments. Part II, “The Concept of Architectural Labor”, presents ideas on the varying nature of architectural work. Part III, “Design(ers)/Build(ers)”, further examines aspects of architecture’s particularity and its current disciplinary condition. Part IV, “The Construction of the Commons”, sets out connections between neo-liberalism, capitalism, and ideas of architectural impoverishment. Part V, “The Profession”, is more optimistic.

It offers strategies in response to the difficult malaise brought into focus in the preceding parts.

While the fifteen essays differ in their point of entry into the discussion of architectural labour, they are connected by a Marxist thread concerned with the possibility of change across the discipline. Highlights in the book are many, but for me, Franco Beradi, Neil Leach, and Deamer herself make the deepest impression.

Franco Beradi's "Dynamic of the General Intellect" paints a picture in which the Intellectual, the Merchant, and the Artist are "the dominant characters of the fable we call Modernity" (8). Reframing them as the Artist, the Engineer, and the Economist, Beradi aims in this demarcation to disentangle their relations with one another to the effect of empowering the artist to better claim their proper role in the triumvirate: that of breaching the status quo and extending knowledge. Beradi further takes aim at the academy and the way in which it has succumb to neo-liberalism through a lack of resistance to the encroachment of meritocracy. He writes, "meritocracy is the Trojan Horse of neoliberal ideology" precisely because it fosters competition over solidarity and a pursuit of research and discovery "dissociated from pleasure and solidarity" (7).

Neil Leach addresses the issue of professional accreditation of academic architecture programmes in his chapter "The (Ac)Credit(ation) Card". With architecture school accreditation an ongoing, normative measure of professional education, here as elsewhere, Leach's position is challenging. His point is that professional accreditation, by holding the schools firm to existing local knowledge, contributes to the under-delivery of architectural education in a rapidly changing global market. He argues for a more flexible model for architectural education and its quality assurance.

Deamer's own chapter, "Work", directly challenges the architectural profession to account for the role and place of labour in design production. The failure to do so, she claims, has resulted in the increasing marginalisation of the profession within the building industry. A necessary first step is to understand the work that designers and architects do as itself *work*. From this position it is then possible to think work and value in more utopian terms—that is, to rethink the way we do it. This leads, as the final part of her text identifies, to alternative models for architectural practice.

No doubt *The Architect as Worker* is confronting, precisely because it asks us to question foundational aspects of architectural education and production. Moreover, it looks towards ways in which that education and production might depart from prevailing socio-economic and aesthetic norms. Yet despite this challenge *The Architect as Worker* offers views that are inclusive and engaging. Presenting stark "left-right" political distinctions as inadequate measures of current architectural patterns, the juxtaposition of perspectives and analyses open up rather than shut down possibilities for future practice.

Reviewing *The Architect as Worker*, invoked two memories specifically for me. Firstly, as a newly employed graduate, I recall walking into the office to begin my twentieth consecutive 12-hour day to find a colleague cleaning up the remains of a coffee cup he had flung at the office wall in a state of fury and exhaustion. Together we calculated that we were earning less than \$9 per hour having

spent five years at university and having racked up significant debt in doing so. Secondly, in a conversation I had with my father just after achieving my NZRAB registration I found myself exclaiming to him “I love what I do, but I hate the way I do it”. What *The Architect as Worker* articulates for me is precisely *why* this isn’t the architectural profession I want to send my students out into. Its greater achievement may be to answer just *how* that profession might be otherwise.

