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

London, Bloomsbury, 2015

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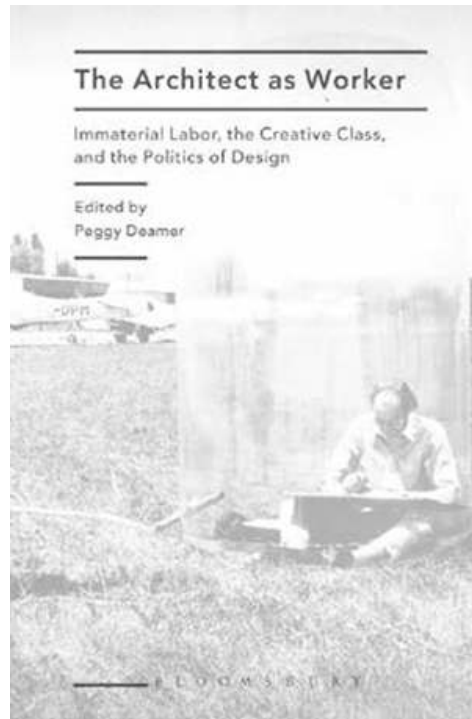
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Peggy Deamer, *The Architect as Worker. Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class, and the Politics of Design*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015. Paperback: £ 17.99 - ISBN 978-1-4725-7049-9 / e-book: £ 17.99 - ISBN 978-1-4725-7052-9

- 1 An anthology of essays that revolve around a cloud of topics concerning the architectural profession – from the notions of immaterial production and creative work at large to the ethics of the profession and the labour conditions in architectural practice – *The Architect as a Worker* includes contributions from practitioners, scholars, theorists and sociologists outside of the architectural milieu, critics and activists. The wide spectrum of themes raised and the many ways they are approached makes the task of providing an exhaustive review particularly difficult, if not impossible.
- 2 The overall point of departure is the fundamental division of work that lays the foundations of the birth of architecture as an ‘immaterial practice’: the divide instituted by the Renaissance masters in the 15th century, when the architect stopped being just a master builder and ‘rose’ from the building site as a professional figure, distinguishing himself from the other workers by virtue of his specific knowledge – *design*.
- 3 If on the one hand such a shift is acknowledged through the classification of architectural practice as belonging to the domain of immaterial labour, the boundary between the two fields is often left unspoken throughout the volume, sometimes even deliberately removed in favour of an overall conception of construction practice as a ‘network’. This goes hand in hand with the revindication of rights and the condemnation of abuses, to be sought as much in the office as on the building site.
- 4 Such a ‘communion’ between *architect* and *worker* – creating a collective exploited subject – and the sudden shifts in themes and registers between contributions are explained and counterbalanced by a *fil rouge* of Marxist criticism, evidenced by recurring quotes from the *Capital* and by an abundance of references to the theories of intellectuals working in the wake of such thought.
- 5 The critical approach, as well as the collective nature of the volume, sets it in line with other works belonging to this extremely important call to arms made by Peggy Deamer, the editor of the book. *The Architect as a Worker* is possibly one chapter of a larger *œuvre*, alongside titles such as *Building (in) the Future: Recasting Labor in Architecture* (Princeton, 2010), *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (Routledge, 2013), and *Asymmetric Labors: The Economy of Architecture in Theory and Practice* (The Architecture Lobby, 2016). Most of the themes dealt with in the book also explicitly feature in the manifesto of “The Architecture Lobby”, an organization of ‘architectural workers’ that confronts the precariousness of the profession by seeking enforcement of labour laws, a change in the system of remuneration in the practice and the de-mystification of the architect as a lone architectural genius.



- 6 The effort made by Deamer and by the impressive collection of minds she has mobilized could be seen as a follow-up to Tafuri's call, issued almost half a century ago, on the 'political backwardness' of the architectural profession. Seen in such a light, the volume is without doubt an important investigation into the issues that stand at the very core of the contemporary condition and the so-called 'creative class', which – especially with regard to architecture – seem to stand as a seismograph at the forefront of any contemporary mutation involving the market economy and labour in general. After awareness has been raised again, what now? What the 'counterplan', what the *project*? A comprehensive answer to such questions seems as yet quite far from being drawn up.
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