

Chapter 5

Work¹

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At a recent symposium, a young audience member asked the distinguished panelists what she could expect from a career in architecture. One of the panelists answered fervently: “Architecture is not a career. It is a calling!”

Prologue: How did we get here?

For a profession that seems to have it all—architects’ creativity, unlike artists, is professionally sanctioned; we make things that matter to the world—how could we be victims of the same capitalist ideology which, in the form of Christianity, asks the poor to feel righteous about their poverty?

My first answer is—we don’t believe we do work. We go to the office, we get a paycheck, but as a profession architecture produces designs, neither mere products nor services. We know we are producing an object (indeed, a big one) but we don’t like to think that we produce a “commodity.” We compare ourselves to doctors and lawyers, but believe our work is too creative and culturally significant to be properly filed under “service sector.” Consequently, we fail to conceptualize our work as work.

In comparison to manufacturing jobs, we lack security structures—unions, guilds, or institutionally sanctioned labor laws—that prevent architectural staff from being fired with no cause, working for no pay, or enduring oppressive hours. Considering that the majority of architectural staff are asked to work 70-hour weeks at an average of \$55K a year, we earn \$15 an hour, roughly the same as my daughter earns babysitting, and are no better off than factory workers. In comparison to service professionals, the starting salary for architects, with comparable years of education at a top school like Yale, is less than a third of that of lawyers and doctors; six years out, that percentage rises but lingers just above 45 percent.²

My second premise is—we have a pathetic notion of design that isolates it from work. Architects design, constructors build; we do art, they do work. This

division, which is both conceptual and contractual, keeps architecture from not only achieving the above described financial and monetary rewards, but also social relevance and personal satisfaction.³ It precludes social relevance because we do not see ourselves in the class of workers. In discussions about minimum wage, in reading about the strikes of non-union food-service providers, in producing designs that are built by indentured labor in Asia and the Middle East—we don't relate. More than this, Marx has made clear that labor is a social issue, not merely because it relates worker to worker, but because it permeates every aspect of our home and psychic life.⁴

The first two parts of this chapter attack architecture's "work-aphasia" from these two observations. Part I exposes polemics about art and creativity that



Figure 5.1 *Casual Fridays, Table Top*, 2002, Maureen Connor. Image one of three from PowerPoint presentation. Although adherence to workplace dress codes has long been an aspect of "performance evaluation," Casual Friday has brought about a transformation of identity and self image within the corporate structure. Fearful of what appeared to be the breakdown of the implicit rules of dress that helped define social and economic boundaries, institutions suddenly needed to find new ways to represent their internal hierarchies and power structures by actively controlling employees' appearance. This included the publication of official dress codes that were then interpreted by self-appointed image consultants, seminars, and self help publications. Bringing together found materials from all sides of the Casual Friday negotiations, this installation used PowerPoint presentation, the technology of corporate communication, to continue the artist's ongoing study and analysis of the aesthetics of power and the power of aesthetics in the contemporary workplace.

refuse to be divorced from issues of work/labor,⁵ value, and money. Art practices are instructive because, if architects think we do art, not work, it's surprising to show that artists *do* think they do work. Part II attacks positions claiming that work in general is inherently not fun, creative, or aesthetic. Theorists, both utopian and practical, who espouse the creative nature of work, offer liberating perspectives on reconstituted and re-managed formulations of work. After this, the implications for architecture are explored.

Part I: Art as work/labor

I've always held the belief that art is labor that deserves proper compensation. It is often difficult to assert this, in all levels of the art system. I'm sure that all involved would agree that art has 'value,' but where the work lies, and who is paying for it becomes a very clouded issue. I have issues with the premise that art is its own reward.⁶

Christine Hill

While aesthetics tends to hold itself apart from issues of labor, the two are historically intertwined. The appearance of labor as a concept distinct from feudal obligations in the late 1400s depended on the artisans who supplied the goods for export trade; the fact that goods came from "free" work allowed it to be conceptualized as exchange value.⁷ Even if artisanal work was not transmitted from workers to employers or exchanged among independent traders, it was central to the mercantile system foreshadowing capitalism.⁸ When industrialization broke the hold guilds had on "free" artisans, they became autonomous workers; at the same time, their work, like all work, became exchangeable as labor-power. With this shift, the distinction between artists and artisans took hold, as artisans were subsumed by assembly production. Yet even within this distinction there are shades; writers, for example, like assembly-workers, were paid by the piece, the delivery of manuscripts being analogous to the weavers' delivery of a bolt of cloth.⁹

Marx suggests that mental production such as art has the potential to escape capitalist ownership of labor. Indeed, we are all potentially artists, the term "artist" existing only in societies framed/defined by the division of labor.

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals ... is a consequence of division of labour. Even if in certain social conditions, everyone were an excellent painter, that would by no means exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter, so that here too the difference between "human"

and “unique” labour amounts to sheer nonsense. In any case, with a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness which arises entirely from division of labour.¹⁰

But art work is *not* free, he says, when it plays into the hands of capitalism. “A writer is a productive laborer in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher who publishes his works, he is a wage laborer for the capitalist.”¹¹ While Marx clearly doesn’t enjoy this capitalist bracketing of occupations, he nevertheless points to its inevitability.

In the early twentieth century, Russian Constructivists added another spin, pressing to prove that art was labor. Given the political atmosphere, they had to prove that art was proletarian, not bourgeois, and did so by emphasizing its kinship to manufacturing. Vladimir Mayakovsky, in the journal *Contemporary Architecture* (1928), lists the necessary requirements for poetry:

1. Poetry is manufacture. A difficult, very complex kind, but a manufacture.
2. Instruction in poetical work doesn’t consist in the study of already fixed and delimited types of poetical objects, but a study of the means for executing all kinds of poetical work, a study of productive procedures that help us make new things.
3. Innovation in material and devices is the basis of every poetical product. ...
9. Only by approaching art as manufacture can you eliminate chance, arbitrariness of taste and individual judgment ... instead of mystically pondering a poetic theme you will have the power to tackle any pressing problem accurately with full poetic qualifications.¹²

Likewise, Alexander Malinovsky, aka Bogdanov, wrote:

Creation, whether technological, socio-economic, political, domestic, scientific, or artistic, represents a kind of labour, and like labour, is composed of organizational (or disorganizational) endeavours. It is exactly the same as labour, whose product is not the repetition of a ready-made stereotype but is something “new”. There is not and cannot be a strict demarcation between creation and ordinary labour; not only are there all the points of interchange, but it is even impossible often to say which of the two designations is more applicable ...¹³

These inspiring pronouncements, while forced by communist conformism, demonstrate a commitment not only to art as labor, but also to co-existence within a work-defined social fabric.

This attitude was shared by German Marxists of the same period, although they, unlike Russian artists, were looking at socialism from the outside. Certain

members of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin principal among them, picked up on the idea that work could be the model for art; others, including Herbert Marcuse, found that art was the model for work. As is well known, Benjamin, in his “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” links mental, artistic production to material, technical production. In this he followed Bertold Brecht’s instructions for “Epic Theatre” which negated the divisions between author and actors, actors and stage-hands, and actors/stage-hands and audience; all were seen as creative workers. Marcuse, on the other hand, while incorporating Theodor Adorno’s belief in the autonomy of art, nevertheless espoused that the aesthetic dimension, in which freedom is imagined, prefigures material labor.¹⁴

Like the Constructivists, certain art practices in the late 1960s and 1970s explored the infiltration of work into art practice. To escape any effete notions of art, the Artist Placement Group (APG) staged events that were equally performance and financial negotiation.¹⁵ Making sure that art was not held apart from systems of value, labor, and social change, they put union representatives on their “board,” placed their artists in industry, and sought and achieved positions in the government.

More recently, in this same tradition, Relational Aesthetics, the name given to a particular trend in art of the 1990s by the French art critic Nicholas Bourriaud, has promoted artists who present “models of action” in the real world and respond to “contemporary precariousness” with a “regime of aesthetics” “based on speed, intermittence, blurring and fragility.”

[Contemporary] art presents itself as an editing console that manipulates social forms, reorganizes them and incorporates them in original scenarios, deconstructing the script on which their illusory legitimacy was grounded. The artist de-programmes in order to re-programme, suggesting that there are other possible usages for the techniques, tools and spaces at our disposition.¹⁶

In her 1996–7 “Volksboutique” in Berlin, Christine Hill, who “always held the belief that art is labor that deserves proper compensation”¹⁷ and who is associated with Relational Aesthetics, managed a thrift shop/sculpture where tea was served, inexpensive clothes were available, and discussions were encouraged. When she franchised her boutique in 1997 for Documenta X in Kassel, she ascribed the role of thrift shop salesgirl to stand-ins. In another piece, she made an audio guide “tour” for which she charged \$12. In yet another, to the outrage of the museum/gallery owner, she included a vending machine that yielded a profit.¹⁸ Also associated with Relational Aesthetics, artist Andrea Fraser, in her 1989 “Museum Highlights,” took the role of docent at

the Philadelphia Museum of Art and described not the artifacts but the history of social difficulties experienced by the Museum.¹⁹ Another, Pierre Huyghe, directed other artists to make videos of a purchased Japanese manga figure he and partner Phillipe Parreno named Annlee, then transferred the copyrights of those videos to the figure's private "association."²⁰ Another, Rirkrit Tiravanija, cooked and served food to the visitors in his exhibition "Untitled" 2002—a work bought by the Guggenheim Museum with the aid of American Express who handled its programming in its PR department and created subsequent programs and events.²¹

Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics has been criticized by artists who operate outside the museum/gallery system for its pseudo-social engagement with a rarified audience. Nevertheless, the "Relational Aesthetic"²² artists operate with complete confidence that their work functions within a system of value that can be toyed with. However, an alternate view of that value-cum-art relationship is offered by Jacques Rancière. Rancière stresses that work is shaped by the logic of art, not the other way around.²³ In his *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004), the "aesthetic regime" of art (in contrast to the more trivial "ethical regime" or "poetic regime"), being "formal" and "sensuous,"²⁴ shapes our political identities and with it our attitude about work. Democracy, for example, is not simply a form of government; it is a specific mode of symbolic structuring only performed by art, whose forms "life uses to shape itself."²⁵ He suggests that Benjamin was wrong in saying that mechanical reproduction/art made available a new visibility of art to the masses; rather, the aesthetic regime was in place before the mechanical/reproductive mode of thinking could begin. In *The Nights of Labour*, Rancière contends that workers in the 1830 French Revolution were not fighting against the hardships they experienced, but against the constricted nature of their lives. At night, instead of recuperating for the next day's work, they read the works of poets and writers who spent their nights producing a language of liberation. After appropriating this other language and performing these other lives, the workers had the strategies needed for rebellion. Art practice "anticipates work because it carries out its principle: the transformation of sensible matter into the community's self-representation."²⁶

Whether art precedes its connection to labor (Marcuse, Rancière) or succeeds it (Constructivism, Benjamin, APG, Relational Aesthetics), artists and aestheticians have historically probed the thin line between the two. Why has architecture not listened? Not noticed?

Part II: Work as art/play

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.²⁷

(Karl Marx)

Just as the tradition of art-as-labor suggests that architecture as a profession should consider “labor value,” the tradition that sees human work as inherently imaginative, creative, and self-realizing should be equally embraced by architects. Creativity in architecture rests not on an ever-expanding categorical inclusion of form-making but rather on an imaginative approach to problem solving.

The essential writing for nearly all who explore the liberating, play-structured aspects of work is Friedrich Schiller’s *Letters Upon The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794). Schiller himself does not address “work,” but he does examine play/art’s essential role in civil society. Civilization, Schiller posits, has suppressed the “sensuous impulse” to serve the “form impulse,” such that when the sensuous emerges out of its repressed state, it is destructive. Art and play, Schiller argues, overcome this negative eruption by transcending the false dichotomy between sense and form. Art, as the “reasonable” realm of the sensual, brings together the sensuous and the formal.²⁸ Play, allowing art to be deployed, makes both the sensuous and the formal “contingent” and hence capable of synthesis.²⁹ In a defense against the possible attack that art, in being aligned with “mere” play, is degraded, Schiller writes, “But what is meant by a mere play, when we know ... that it is play which makes man complete and develops simultaneously his twofold nature? What you style limitation ... I name enlargement.”³⁰

Working from Schiller, Gottfried Semper justified his aesthetic position in his “Prolegomena” to *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics* (1860) by appeal to pleasure and play. As he writes,

On a more exalted plane, what we mean by terms like ‘sense of beauty,’ ‘delight in beauty,’ ‘enjoyment of art,’ and ‘artistic instinct’ is analogous to those instincts, pleasures, and gratifications that govern the way in which we maintain our telluric existence ... Surrounded by a world full of wonder and forces whose laws we may divine ... we conjure up in play the perfection that is lacking ... In such play we satisfy our cosmogonic instinct.³¹

As has been described, Marx's ideal socialist society, shaped by his readings of Schiller and other German Romantic philosophers,³² envisions all workers as creative and everyone as an artist. "In a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities."³³ But when work serves capital, "freedom" is only found *outside* of work. Marx, in other words, sets out the negative image of labor imposed by capitalism that subsequent, more optimistic theorists have striven to revise.

Utopians go back and forth between espousing Marx's negative view of industrial production and endorsing a hoped-for society where all work is imaginative. For example, where Welsh social reformer Robert Owen, in his "Report to the County of Lanark" (1820), structured his New Lanark mill town to limit work to eight hours—leaving time for reading, gardening, and exercise—French socialist and phalanx theorizer Charles Fourier, in his *Theory of the Four Movements and the General Destinies* (1808), insists that, if "industry is the fate assigned to us by the Creator, how can one believe that he wishes to force us into it—that he does not know how to bring to bear some nobler means, some enticement capable of transforming work with pleasure."³⁴ Where American socialist Edward Bellamy, in his utopian novel *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), describes a regime dictating the strict division of work tasks and the division between work and leisure,³⁵ English textile designer and Marxist/socialist William Morris, in his *News from Nowhere* (1890) rebuttal to *Looking Backward*, describes how people in his ideal community live out Marx's vision to "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner,"³⁶ changing jobs for the pleasure of edification. Ebenezer Howard's precise division of private work and public pleasure in his *Garden City* was countered by Frank Lloyd Wright's insistence, in "Broadacre City," that "our leisure, our culture and our work will be our own and as nearly as possible, One."³⁷ Le Corbusier, not necessarily in disagreement with any particular previous architect/utopian but nevertheless insisting on the essential value of (real) play, says, "Only those who play are serious types The mountain climbers, the rugby players and the card players, and the gamblers, are frauds, for they do not play."³⁸

If these utopians, in giving a picture of *ideal* work, only underscore its actual unpleasantness, twentieth century philosophers of work, who fall into one of two camps—neo-Marxists and pragmatists—look at creative aspects of work within capitalism. Herbert Marcuse picks up Marx's philosophic probing of Schiller's emphasis on the role of play in a civil society; Marcuse contests the labor/leisure divide dominating the discourse of German sociologists such as Max Weber. Equating Schiller's dichotomy of the sensuous versus formal instincts with Freud's pleasure versus reality principles, work is elevated by Marcuse to

the pleasure principle. In *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955), he writes:

[T]he abolition of toil, the amelioration of the environment ... flow directly from the pleasure principle, and, at the same time, they constitute *work* [his emphasis] which associates individuals to “greater unities”; no longer confined within the mutilating domination of the performance principle, they modify the impulse without deflecting it from its aim. There is sublimation and, consequently, culture; but this sublimation proceeds in a system of expanding and enduring libidinal relations, which are in themselves work relations.³⁹

This condition is not pervasive, but individuals are capable of tapping into their libidinal energy to transform production. “The biological drive becomes a cultural drive.”⁴⁰

Recent neo-Marxists emphasize the communal, cooperative, and collaborative nature of contemporary work. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s *The Labor of Dionysus* (1977 Italian; 1994 English) and Maurizio Lazzarato’s “Immaterial Labor” (1996) analyze “labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.” In the transition from a service to an information economy, Negri and Hardt say, “cooperation is completely immanent in the labouring process itself.”⁴¹ As Lazzarato puts it, work is now the domain of “mass intellectuality” and,

can be defined as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation. In this phase, workers are expected to become ‘active subjects’ in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command. We arrive at a point where a collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity, because it is no longer a matter of finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones.⁴²

Because the old model for describing production and consumption is no longer useful, one should turn to the aesthetic model involving “author, reproduction, and reception:” if “author” loses its individuality, “reproduction” becomes organization, and “reception” is also communication.⁴³

Alexander Galloway, speculating about post-capitalism, sees play—the ultimate goal—as already embedded in our capitalist production structures.

After trying to understand how to imagine a life after capitalism, and seeing how this is both done and undone in everything from *World of Warcraft* to the stratagems of Donald Rumsfeld, what one sees is how two of the hitherto most

useful tropes for communicating a life after or outside capitalism—networks and play—are slowly shifting from what Rumsfeld calls the unknown unknowns ... to the known unknowns, and perhaps simply to the known. ... What is clear is that the possibility of life after capitalism is often articulated today through a utilization of the very essence of capitalism. Play is work and networks are sovereigns.⁴⁴

Like Lazzarato, Galloway insists that the play-oriented side of work can wreak havoc on the existing system.

The pragmatist trajectory of work-play-art centers on the writings of John Dewey who, in his analysis of education, valorized play as essential to development. In holding a view of education that was playful and child-like while also encouraging a Protestant work ethic, he redefined work to mean something like play—spontaneous, voluntary, fulfilling. Dewey writes:

What has been termed active occupation includes both play and work. In their intrinsic meaning, play and industry are by no means so antithetical to one another as is often assumed, any sharp contrast being due to undesirable social conditions. Both involve ends consciously entertained and the selection and adaptations of materials and processes designed to effect the desired ends. The difference between them is largely one of time-span, influencing the directness of the connection of means and ends. In play, the interest is more direct.⁴⁵

Play passes into work when “(t)he demand for continuous attention is greater, and more intelligence must be shown in selecting and shaping means.”⁴⁶

Donald Schön, whose doctoral thesis in philosophy at Harvard was on Dewey’s theory of inquiry, applied Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy to his theories of organizations. Arguing that “change” was a fundamental feature of modern life and recognizing that companies, social movement, and governments were essentially systems of change, he explored them as learning systems of “groping and inductive process(es).” His interest in jazz linked work to improvisation and “thinking on one’s feet;” through a feedback loop of experience, work, like art and music, is “practiced.” Famously, he also said that an organization, to stimulate change, must create conditions in which the individual practitioner is committed to an action because it is intrinsically satisfying, not because it provides external rewards.

Peter Drucker, “the man who invented corporate society” and who was the guru of corporate management from the 1950s through the 1980s, forecasts, like Schön, capitalism’s decentralization, privatization, and marketing. But in his *Post-Capitalist Society*, Drucker goes farther than Schön in describing the nature of work in late capitalism. In the eighteenth century, Drucker says, the worker’s knowledge was applied to tools; in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

it was applied to productivity (Taylorization); today, he says, it is being applied to knowledge itself. Today, “knowledge workers” own the means of production: that is, knowledge. Because the skills held by these workers—research, product design, fabrication, marketing, advertising, customer consulting, financing, contracting—allow technical insights to be linked to marketing strategy and financial acumen, the traditional distinction between goods and services breaks down. Moreover, the traditional factors of production—land, labor, and capital—are restraints rather than drivers; indeed, no class, he points out, has risen or fallen as quickly as the blue-collar worker. Emphasizing here and in earlier writings that organizations have been “too thing focused” and produced too *many* things, he advocates “planned abandonment,” non-infatuation with yesterday’s successes, stream-lining, and embracing destabilization. In addition, the goal of organizational management is to recognize that the most valuable resource is the worker (the most flexible and intelligent component of the system); to construct alternative, specialist-based models of organizations; and to acknowledge that the real business of business is “not how to do things right but how to find the right thing to do.”

Work of this sort, which architecture epitomizes—not because it makes form but because it organizes itself so fluidly—sounds pretty fun.



Figure 5.2 *Casual Fridays, Exhausted*, 2002, Maureen Connor.

Part III: Architecture

The two trajectories followed here yield remarkably similar projections for post-Fordist work: creativity applied not to object-making but to process; destabilization; organizational flexibility; planned obsolescence; empowering the autonomy of the worker. Architecture increasingly operates this way even if its overt structures do not yet reflect it. Design today is not merely the conjuring of an object, but a problem-defining, problem-solving, information-structuring activity that, on the basis of understood conditions and rules, defines a specific course of action.⁴⁷ Instead of it being done by “an architect,” architectural work is the creative manipulation of specialized design developed by a socially diverse panoply of contributors. Increasingly, architectural work is distributed and dispersed, collaborative and entrepreneurial, knowledge-based and open-sourced, specialized and flexible.

The benefit for architects—if we endorse the idea that our knowledge/service is spatial, material, and organizational innovation—is a reconception of our compensation and our place in the social fabric.

A reconception of compensation begins with the elimination of percentage-of-construction fees that reinforces the disastrous idea that our value resides in the object we produce and not in the knowledge that produced it. It not only wrongly places value on the one-offness of the object but also, as piece-work, aligns us with the most degrading form of compensation. Marx is clear on this: “Piece-wages therefore lay the foundation of ... the hierarchically organized system of exploitation and oppression.”

The quality of the labour is here (in piece-work) controlled by the work itself, which must be of the average perfection if the piece-price is to be paid in full. Piece-wages become, from this point of view, the most fruitful source of reduction of wages and capitalistic cheating ...

Given piece-wage, it is naturally the personal interest of the labourer to strain his labour-power as intensely as possible; this enables the capitalist to raise more easily the normal degree of intensity of labour. It is moreover now the personal interest of the labourer to lengthen the working day, since with it his daily or weekly wages rise.⁴⁸

If you are an architect, this likely sounds familiar.

Alternatives to this not only resist the piece-work model of compensation but also its architect-as-subordinate-to-owner framework. The most obvious option is to *be* the developer-owner. But more crafty and less financially demanding approaches exist. In the Integrated Project Delivery use of the Special Purpose

Entity, a type of limited liability company, the owner puts aside an agreed-upon amount of money determined to be the project's worth; the architect and the contractors (and others) provide services at cost so they, in any case, do not lose money. It is agreed that there can be no lawsuits. If and when the work costs are lower than the target cost, there is a three-way split of savings. Likewise, pay by percentage-of-profit, a calculation used to pay independent project managers, would identify the value added by architectural intervention, a figure that would not be difficult to identify if records were sought. Another fee alternative is the formation of a publicly traded company that, like tech start-ups, relies on investor banking on the intelligence architectural firms can bring to the beauty, procurement, performance, and maintenance of the built environment. Skepticism regarding the ability of an architectural corporation to produce consistent shareholder profits is alleviated when one considers the expertise—environmental, material, economic, structural, procedural—available to the architect via parametrics and building information modeling (BIM).⁴⁹ The spread of expertise and the invasion of architectural intelligence into areas once divorced from the discipline—for example, BIM management, facilities management, or construction management⁵⁰—are potential architectural domains.

Models of compensation other than the existing hourly or yearly salary present themselves for architectural staff as well. Knowledge-based organizations compete for the best and the brightest and hence consistently refine their modes of compensation to balance appeal to and retention of top prospects with firm profitability. That architecture firms sadly do not yet approach their hiring and compensation in this manner is surely related to the fact that architecture school graduates, despite seven years of expensive education, present themselves as cheap labor. Be that as it may, in lieu of flat compensation rates, incentive-driven wages should be considered. Co-ownership, performance-based compensation, “pay-at-risk,” employee stock options, or other firm owner-employee contracts sharing value creation and profit are common in new-economy, knowledge work compensation models. In *Capital*, Marx adds this footnote in his discussion about piece-work:

Even Watts, the apologetic, remarks: ‘It would be a great improvement to the system of piece-work, if all the men employed on a job were partners in the contract, each according to his abilities, instead of one man being interested in overworking his fellows for his own benefit.’⁵¹

If we never again want to hear a potential architectural employee say that they understand why they will get paid next to nothing since they know the firm

they hope to work for earns next to nothing, we also need to look to unions. Unions—the modern incarnation of the guild system so admired by architecture for its designer/maker integration but totally overlooked as a human resource apparatus for the profession—have traditionally served creative organizations. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG, now combined with the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) to create SAG-AFTRA), was founded in 1933 to stop exploitation of Hollywood actors signed by major studios to multi-year contracts that had no restrictions on work hours or any required breaks. Actors Equity, founded in 1913 representing American actors and stage managers, negotiates wages and working conditions and provides health and pension plans for its members. In the same vein, the Freelance Workers Union, formed in 1995, offers health, disability, and life insurance and has recently opened a Brooklyn walk-in health clinic for its members. Their resources include corporate discounts, job postings, and contract deliberation tutorials.

These unions, traditionally militant organizations whose members have been willing to strike, are today less anti-management and more communities of support and promotion. As Lowell Peterson, the director of the Writers Guild of America, East writes,

I do not have the wisdom to proclaim whether a national economy can be sustained on the basis of moving around pieces of paper representing capital, or on the basis of creating and selling innovative ideas without actually making physical products. But I do think the economy will be based on services for quite some time. The Writers Guild of America, East knows how to represent knowledge workers ... (who) build ... stories for television, radio, movie screens, and the internet (and for whom) employment is contingent, job-to-job, script-to-script, show-to-show.⁵²

These alternate forms of compensation and security operating in the heart of capitalism should not be held as perfect solutions for humanist, aesthetic production. But the discomfort we surely feel when trying on these other models of organization indicates the inexcusable conceptual distance between architectural work and other labor structures. The scary thing is not the unfamiliarity of these structures; it is our righteous ignorance of them.

The social benefit of labor lessons for architecture is being social identified *at all*. Workers identify with workers. While many of the artists associated with Relational Aesthetics refused to have their work exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi—a building built by indentured labor—architects remain unmoved. Pleas by Human Rights Watch for architects designing buildings in the Emirates and China to pressure their clients to reform bad construction

practices have fallen on deaf ears. Architects rightly claim that they are not at the negotiating table, but sadly refuse to reflect on how their disengagement impacts this tragedy. Architecture, either in the form of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) or the office structure, needs to shed its work-aphasia and identify as an organization of workers. Only then will its cultural caché have real social value.

At this transitional moment in the profession, when design responsibility and financial savvy are shared amongst various players, the constitution of a new model for architectural practice is entirely open. Now is the time to think expansively about what we want this new practice to look like and how its organization might be linked to larger social, political, and economic formations. As newly enlightened players in the labor game, architects are free to move directly toward an imagined ideal.

Notes

1. Reprinted with permission of *Perspecta*, Yale School of Architecture. "Work," *Perspecta 47: Money* (2014): 27–39.
2. See Phil Bernstein's article "Money, Value, Architects, Buildings," in *Perspecta 47: Money* (2014): 14–20. I am indebted to him for sharing and expanding on the indignation expressed here about the profession of architecture.
3. While the division between design and construction has existed since the Renaissance, work-aphasia and the unhappiness it causes has not. Between the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, drawings produced by the architect were intentionally incomplete to allow for the input of the constructor's craft. The drawings described the effect to be achieved and were considered objects of beauty in their own right. During the Industrial Revolution, when craft in construction was at risk of being spread out over a number of trades, architects and craftsmen together fought the effects of the division of labor by turning to the interior as the provenance of synthesized design and industrially produced craft. In the twentieth century, in keeping with the (popular?) turn in economic concern from production to consumption, architects saw themselves as producing not just the modern, clean, unsentimental building but the modern, healthy, unsentimental citizen. While this concern for the client as opposed to the constructor/laborer was initially ethical and public in nature, it quickly became practical and private as architects aimed to please their clients, not educate them. The architect's social concern, having shifted from builder to owner/user, disappeared all together.
4. James Surowiecki describes how low-margin enterprises like McDonald's, depending on cheap labor for its 6-cents-on-the-dollar profit, need to be re-conceived. It is not merely that McDonald's needs to pay more, "It isn't enough to make bad jobs better. We need to create better jobs." One can't dismiss the similarity between architecture and McDonald's as low-margin industries. How many times have we heard the excuse

of the under-paid staff member: "How can I ask for more money when I know the boss isn't paid properly either?" James Surowiecki, "The Pay Is Too Damn Low," *The New Yorker*, 12 August, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/08/12/the-pay-is-too-damn-low> (accessed 9 September, 2014).

5. If the term "labor" has a negative connotation—work indicates use-value, labor indicates exchange value; work is distinctly human while labor is bestial, never-ending, animal-like—it also correctly insists that production is organized by a system of value that is socially constructed.
6. Regine, "Interview with Christine Hill," *We Make Money Not Art Blog*, 4 July, 2007. <http://we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2007/07/interview-with-20.php#.UgRUaxbq2Do> (accessed 5 May, 2012); see also Lucy Lippard and Barbara Steiner, eds., *Inventory: The Work of Christine Hill and Volksboutique* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004).
7. Richard Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain 1640–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 215. Biernacki continues on the following page:

As early as the 1470s, Italian administrators who wrote on government policy identified labor as the primary source of a state's wealth. A century later, the noted economist Giovanni Botero reaffirmed the centrality of labor when he said that neither the gold mines of the New World nor the landed estates of the Old produced so much wealth as "the industrie of men and the multitude of Artes."

8. *Ibid.*, 235. Biernacki continues:

During the first century of liberal commercialism in Britain, the belief persisted that workers delivered their labor only under the compulsions of law and hunger. Many enterprises in pottery, mining, and textiles bound their laborers by servile terms of indenture that held them to the same employer for terms of one to twenty years. After the middle of the eighteenth century, employers began to rely upon cash rather than coercive stipulations to secure labor. The opinion slowly and tentatively took hold that workers could be stimulated to work harder by the promise of higher earnings.

9. Biernacki, in *Fabrication of Labor*, shows that in Britain and Germany weavers were paid by the quantity of production, but what was quantified was different in the two countries. In Britain, the piecework rates were based on the number of weft threads per inch. In Germany rates were calculated by the number of shuttle moves across the warp, i.e., by the time required to produce a given length of cloth. In other words, in Britain, the commodification of labor was understood as "the appropriation of workers' materialized labor via its products," (88) while in Germany, it was understood as the timed appropriation over workers' labor activity. Biernacki outlines how these differences in piece-work compensation for weavers led Germany and Britain to have radically different ideas about what constituted a copyrightable literary "work." Britain, with a tradition of paying by the manuscript (labor materialized in a product),

- determined that copyright protection was based on possession of the physical document produced by the author, implying that there was nothing to distinguish an “author” from any other person—a critic, a commentator, an accountant—who could deliver a document. Germany, on the other hand, with a tradition of paying by the page (labor materialized by the movement of the pen), struggled to determine what ultimately held together the pages as a “work,” deciding it was the originality of the authors’ ideas. Originality, in other words, was granted the privileged copyright condition in Germany, not in Britain. Richard Biernacki, “Contradictory Schemas of Action: Manufacturing Intellectual Property” (lecture, Havens Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004).
10. “The German Ideology of Marx and Engels,” Marxists.org, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03l.htm> (accessed 9 September, 2014).
 11. Karl Marx, “Productivity of Capital/Productive and Unproductive Labor,” in *Theories of Surplus Value*, pt. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), 401.
 12. Quoted in Catherine Cooke, *Russian Avant-Garde* (London: Academy Editions, 1995), 100; translated by the author from *Sovremennaiia arkhitektura: SA or Contemporary Architecture* 6 (1928): 160–6.
 13. A. Bogdanov, “puti proletarskogo tvorchestva” (Paths of proletarian creative work), *Proletarskaia kui'tura*, 15/16 (1920): 50–2; translated in J. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–1934* (London, New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 178–82.
 14. See Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); Larry Hartwick, “On the Aesthetic Dimension: A Conversation with Herbert Marcuse.” <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/70spubs/78InterviewAesthDim.htm> (accessed 5 May, 2012), also *Contemporary Literature* 22 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1981): 417–24.
 15. Founded in 1966, this artist-run organization in London redirected art away from the gallery and toward business and government.
 16. Nicholas Bourriaud, “Precarious Constructions: Answers to Jacques Rancière on Art and Politics,” *Open* 17 (2009): 20–37. [http://www.skor.nl/_files/Files/OPEN17_P20-37\(3\).pdf](http://www.skor.nl/_files/Files/OPEN17_P20-37(3).pdf) (accessed 16 July, 2010).
 17. Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor*.
 18. Lippard and Steiner, eds, *Inventory: The Work of Christine Hill and Volksboutique*.
 19. Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2005).
 20. The collaborative project known as “NO Ghost Just a Shell and the film, *One Million Kingdoms*,” was one of the first venues to display Annlee.
 21. See Walead Beshty, “Neo-Avantgarde and Service Industry: Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics,” *Texte Zur Kunst* 59 (September 2005), <http://www.textezurkunst.de/59/neo-avantgarde-and-service-industry>
 22. The artists who Bourriaud enumerates under the Relational Aesthetics designation do not, themselves, so identify. It is a descriptive category that he uses to describe a contemporary zeitgeist.

23. The territorial disagreement between Rancière and Bourriaud goes like this: the emphasis that Bourriaud puts on empirical acts of art making is seen by Rancière as keeping intact, despite Bourriaud's espousal of a participatory audience, a traditional and passive view of art consumption. The emphasis that Rancière puts on historical examples, in Bourriaud's view, misses the changing nature of both aesthetic consumption and production in today's open source, transitory society.
24. These are Friedrich Schiller's terms. In the second part of this chapter, Schiller's view of art is elaborated. Rancière should be seen in the long lineage of aestheticians reworking Schiller's view of art in civil society.
25. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 23.
26. The quote goes on, "The texts written by the young Marx that confer upon work the status of the generic essence of mankind were only possible on the basis of German Idealism's aesthetic programme, i.e. art as the transformation of thought into the sensory experience of the community" (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 44). And farther on, he continues: "(T)he cult of art presupposes a revalorization of the abilities attached to the very idea of work ... What ever might be the specific types of economic circuits that lie within, artistic practices are not exceptions to other practices. They represent and reconfigure the distribution of these activities" (Rancière, 45).
27. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (New York: New World Paperbacks, 1967), 178; quoted in David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 58.
28. J. C. Friedrich Schiller, Letter 25, *The Harvard Classics, Vol. 32: Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909–14).
29. Explicitly, Schiller says:

The instinct of play ... in which both (the formal and the sensuous) act in concert, will render both our formal and our material constitution contingent, accordingly, our perfection and our happiness in like manner...(!)t will place (feeling and passion) in harmony with rational ideas, and by taking from the laws of reason their moral constraints, it will reconcile them with the interest of the senses.

(Ibid. Letter 14, 27–8)

30. Ibid, Letter 15, 30.
31. Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics* trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Michael Robinson ed. Willy Boesiger, rom work." er 2014, (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Research Publication, 2004), 81–82.
32. For a description of Marx's faith in the classical imaginary, see George E. McCarthy, *Classical Horizons: The Origins of Sociology in Ancient Greece* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003).
33. "The German Ideology of Marx and Engels," Marxists.org, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03l.htm> (accessed 9 September, 2014). In the ideal society, as the above quote continues:

nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.

34. Quoted in Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 217n. 31.
35. In *Looking Backwards*, Bellamy's work model is the following: the nation has become the sole capitalist; work an obligation for every citizen; work from age twenty-four to forty-five ("industrial army"); people choose their own career based on talents; everyone pre-twenty-four is educated about all the trades; adjust the appeal of popular and unpopular work by shortening the length of the unpopular and lengthening that of the popular; but there are also some second choices; healthy conditions for all; a class of unskilled, common laborers, made up of the first three years you do work; whether it is white collar or blue collar is up to the individual and there is no prestige to one or the other; schools of both are nationalized; since the government owns and distributes all, there is no need for trade, and with no need for trade, no need for money; a credit card is issued corresponding to his share of the annual product of the nation, with which he procures from the public storehouse.
36. See note 21.
37. Frank Lloyd Wright, *When Democracy Builds* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1945). Quoted in Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982), 129. On the previous page, Wright imagines a Broadacre City life that is remarkably similar to Marx's post-revolutionary one. "Everyone would have the skills to be a part-time farmer, a part-time mechanic, and a part-time intellectual. Only drudgery would be absent from work."
38. Le Corbusier, *Last Works*, ed. Willy Boesiger (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 174. Quoted in Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 20.
39. Marcuse, 212.
40. *Ibid.* As he continues, "The pleasure principle reveals its own dialectic. The erotic aim of sustaining the entire body as subject-object of pleasure calls on the continual refinement of the organism, the intensification of its receptivity, the growth of its sensuousness. The aim generates its own project of realization" (18).
41. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 294.
42. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," <http://wordpress.anti-thesis.net/projects/notes/labour-lazzarato.txt> (accessed 20 August, 2012).
43. Lazzarato insists that this is not "utopian" because this form of work still describes capitalism's operations, as the subjects need still to conform to the demands of "production for production's sake." Critics of immaterial labor point out that labor

always had an immaterial side—Marx’s argument was never to stress the physical nature of work but rather the social and subjective construct in which work operates—and immaterial labor always will have a material side—sweating through our time in front of the computer, the kitchen sink, or the shopping counter.

44. Alexander Galloway, “*Warcraft* and Utopia,” *1000 Days of Theory*, *ctheory.net*, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=507> (accessed 15 July, 2011). The quote continues,

And finally that virtual worlds are always in some basic way the expression of utopian desire, and in doing so they present the very impossibility of imagining utopia; ... the very act of creating an immaterial utopian space at the same time inscribes a whole vocabulary of algorithmic coding into the plane of imagination that thereby undoes the play of utopia in the first place. The key is not to mourn this transformation, but to examine cultural and media forms themselves and through them (borrowing a line from Jameson) to pierce through the representation of social life both how it is lived now and (how?) we feel in our bones it ought rather to be lived.

45. See Chapter 3 of John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Wilder Publications, 2009 [1916]).

46. *Ibid.*

47. See Paolo Tombesi, “On the Cultural Separation of Design Labor,” in *Building in the Future: Recasting Labor in Architecture*, Peggy Deamer and Phillip G. Bernstein, eds (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 117–36, for an excellent discussion on architecture’s confusion over its labor practices.

48. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Part II (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 605–6. If this scenario only seems to speak to the architectural firm partner in relationship to the client/owner and not to the salaried worker that makes up the bulk of the profession, Marx covers that, too. As he continues:

[The hierarchical organized system of exploitation and oppression] has two fundamental forms. On the hand piece-wages facilitates the “sub-letting of labor” ... On the other hand piece-wages allows the capitalist to make a contract for so much per piece with the head labourer ... at a price for which the head labourer himself undertakes the enlisting and payment of his assistant workpeople. The exploitation of the labourer by the capitalist is here effected through the exploitation of the labourer by the labourer. (606)

The initial problem swims downstream.

49. Caudill, Rowlett, Scott (CRS), at one point the largest architectural firm in the country, was the first architectural corporation to appear, in 1971, on the U.S. stock exchange. While their move to public ownership has been criticized as the beginning of the decline of the firm as it changed from “one ambitious but still service-oriented (and) imbued with humanistic ethos” to one that was merely profit oriented (see Paolo Tombesi, “Capital Gains and Architectural Losses: The Transformative Journey of Caudill

Rowlett Scott (1948–1994)," *The Journal of Architecture* 11:2, 145–68), the structure of public ownership itself is not to blame, as many tech companies today demonstrate. Equally noteworthy for contemporary practice is CRS's "marketing through research" which preceded the public offering and is linked to it by the desire to escape a merely client-driven reputation. As Avigail Sachs describes in her "Marketing through Research: William Caudill and Caudill, Rowlett, Scott (CRS)," (*The Journal of Architecture* 13:6, 737–52), "Presenting the work of the firm as research, and not only as design, created a link between architects as professionals and scientists," a valuable asset in the Cold War, tech dominated economy of the 1950s and 1960s. It also solved, Sachs says, the paradox of needing to impress both clients (marketing) and peers (research). Current firms that are publicly held corporations are AECOM and URS (formerly United Research Services).

50. SHoP's three organizations (SHoP Architecture, SHoP Construction, HeliOptix) are precursors of this type of organizational entity.
51. "Economic Manuscripts: Capital Vol. 1 – Chapter Twenty-One," Marxists.org, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch21.htm> (accessed 9 September, 2014).
52. "Representing Knowledge Workers in the New Era," *AFL-CIO Blog*, 11 April, 2011, <http://www.aflcio.org/Blog/Economy/Representing-Knowledge-Workers-in-the-New-Era> (accessed 6 April, 2013).