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Notes on Tafuri, Militancy, and Unionization

Architecture, connected to systems of political power and reliant on large amounts of capital, has not been immune to the political shifts of the last four years. The US experienced a spike in new construction under Trump, and in 2021, even with rising construction costs due to pandemic-induced supply-chain issues, building boomed.[1] During this same period, groups like the Architecture Lobby[2] and publications like *Failed Architecture*[3] have given voice to a rising discontent within a profession that people often choose because they want to improve the world, only to find themselves working long hours for little pay, drawing buildings that will improve nothing but a developer's bottom line.

Architecture firms are businesses. And, like any business, the interests of those who own architecture firms are often counterposed to the interests of those who work in them. Even if they're working for the public sector, firm owners will always be motivated to cut costs and increase profit. Within architecture writ large, these tendencies have historically been bolstered by a sense of cultural alignment between architectural workers and their firm-owning bosses. Buying into the idea that good design takes sacrifice and that said sacrifice might lead them to one day become firm owners themselves, architectural workers have historically not put up much of a fight for better conditions at work. Over the last half decade, we have seen that changing. Most recently, in New York City, workers at SHoP Architects undertook a union drive, and workers at two other New York City firms are doing the same.[4] While SHoP's campaign ultimately failed, it points to a growing identification with working-class interests among architects, and to a potential shift in who within architecture firms wields power and to what ends.

So where do we go from here? It's not the first time of political unrest, nor is it the first time that architectural workers[5] have sought to understand how they might participate in bringing about a better world. Manfredo Tafuri, writing in the late 1960s and early '70s, during a time of sustained political upheaval, elucidated the class position of architects and the particular relationship of architecture, both as a profession and as an object, to capitalism as a system. Drawing upon Tafuri's 1973 book *Architecture and Utopia* in an operative fashion, we seek to apply its insights to our current context.[6]

While the conditions under which we write and labor today feel (and indeed in some ways are) unprecedented, others have been here before and

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[1] Ian Volner, "The 2021 Building Boom That No One Talked About," *Metropolis*, December 28, 2021, [link](#).

[2] The Architecture Lobby (TAL) was founded in 2015 as a group to advocate for the value of architecture and architectural labor. Since then, TAL has been vocal about labor issues in the profession and has advocated openly in favor of unionization. We understand their work to have played a role in shifting the cultural landscape in architecture to the political left and to have raised awareness of labor issues, as well as potential solutions to them through unionization. See, for example, the organization's statement in support of the SHoP Architects union: Architecture Lobby, "T-A-L Statement in Support of Architectural Workers United at SHoP Architects," Architecture Lobby, December 23, 2021, [link](#). See, too, on the outcome of the attempted unionization at SHoP Architects, Dan Roche, "Organizing SHoP," *New York Review of Architecture*, no. 23, February 2022, [link](#).

[3] See, for example, the essay by Marisa Cortright, which argues against the myth of the "calling" in architecture labor: Marisa Cortright, "Death to the Calling: A Job in Architecture Is Still a Job," *Failed Architecture*, August 15, 2019, [link](#).

[4] Isabelle Ling, "Inside the Historic Union Drive at SHoP Architects," *Curbed*, February 4, 2022, [link](#).

[5] When referring to people working in the field of architecture today, we use the term "architectural workers," after the work of Marisa Cortright, who, in her 2021 book "Can this be? Surely this cannot be?" Architectural Workers Organizing in Europe, uses the same term: "I deliberately specify 'architectural workers' and not 'architects' not only because I am not an architect, but because there are many workers besides architects who take part in the production of architecture." See: Marisa Cortright, "Can this be? Surely this cannot be?" *Architectural Workers Organizing in Europe* (Prague: VIPER Gallery, 2021), 4.

[6] Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976). Originally

sought to answer the same questions we have: how does architecture work under capitalism? How should architectural workers understand their class position? How might architectural workers contribute to larger efforts to make society more just and more equal in ways that might include but also go beyond architecture itself?

Through a reading of Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia*, we seek to shed light on present conditions—the changing class positions of those working in architecture, the formalist tools for world improvement that the profession has classically lent them, and the nonarchitectural tools they have taken up—in a way that might help us to chart a path forward for architectural workers who want to improve not only their profession but the world at large. We take an explicitly socialist position that understands mass coordinated action as the primary tool with which to take power from capitalists and put it in the hands of workers in order to bring about societal change.

Who's Afraid of Proletarianization?

Modern architects, according to Tafuri, readily embraced capitalist development. In his essay “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology,”[7] and in its book-length expansion, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, he argued that modern architecture had accepted the conditions of its own commodification, seeking to fully integrate itself with the “Project” of capital: “the reorganization of production, distribution, and consumption within the capitalist city.”[8] As exemplified by the repositioning of the discipline proposed by Le Corbusier in *Towards a New Architecture* (1923), architecture sought to escape its academic and Beaux Arts orientations and realign itself to support the development of industrial capitalism.[9] Not only would the practice of architecture make itself relevant to this development but it would seek to secure a place at its leading edge, rendering itself a projective instrument of design and planning for the capitalist metropolis and its systems of production. [10]

This, however, was a failed endeavor. As Tafuri argued in *Architecture and Utopia*, the efforts of modern architects to position themselves as central to capitalist development only brought about their own marginalization. Setting itself up as a “Utopia serving the objectives of the reorganization of production,” the movement of modern architecture discovered that its visions could only be achieved through the total “reorganization of the city”—a project over which it could exert no influence. The visions of modern architects were thereby found to be dependent on larger and external forces to provide the conditions for their realization.[11] “The planning enunciated by architectural and urban theories,” noted Tafuri, “referred to something other than itself.”[12] These theories were consequently cast by Tafuri as “utopian” in the sense that they obscure “the fact that their ideology of planning could be realized in building production only by indicating that it is beyond it that the true plan can take form.”[13] As he concluded of this misadventure, “architecture and urbanism would have to be the objects and not the subjects of the Plan.”[14] The result was that architects could offer up only the “ideology” of the plan, but not planning itself.

published as *Progetto e Utopia* (Bari: Laterza, 1973). We use the term “operative” here conscious of its resonance for any discussion of Tafuri's writings. In *Theories and History*, originally published in 1968, Tafuri criticized historians such as Bruno Zevi and Paolo Portoghesi for practicing “operative history.” History, for Tafuri, becomes an operative or instrumental practice when approached and written so as to underwrite contemporary concerns. We note in this essay how Tafuri's writings are themselves subjected to an operative use in architecture theory and practice. For us, however, the point is not to morally condemn what are the perhaps unavoidable practices of selection and interpretation in making arguments through historical analysis—to criticize operativity as such. Instead, and as partisans in class struggle, we are unashamedly putting Tafuri's writings and ideas to other ends than those of sustaining existing class relations.

[7] Manfredo Tafuri, “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology,” trans. Stephen Sartarelli, in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), originally published as “Per una critica dell'ideologia architettonica,” *Contropiano* 2, no. 1 (1969): 31–79.

[8] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 48.

[9] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1964).

[10] For Tafuri this phenomenon is best exemplified in the planning of German cities between 1923 and 1933. Here architects and planners such as Ernst May in Frankfurt and Martin Wagner in Berlin designed settlements for workers that were supposed to resolve for social democratic administrations the contradictions between large-scale industrial development and labor. While, as Tafuri notes, architects thereby positioned themselves as the active ideologues of a Keynesian political economy, their projects are never truly situated in the heart of the metropolis, nor are they able to effectively address its ongoing conditions of crisis and contradiction. See *Architecture and Utopia*, especially Chapter 5, “‘Radical’ Architecture and the City,” 104–124.

[11] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 98–99.

[12] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 99.

[13] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 99.

[14] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 99.

Tafuri's critique of Utopia in architecture drew substantially on Marx and Engels's critique of Utopian Socialism.[15] For Marx and Engels, the practice of Utopian Socialism consisted of positing fantastical solutions to real conditions of crisis and contradiction wrought by capitalism and its development, unrelated to and unmoored from their material and historical realities. As they wrote in their criticism of the Utopian Socialists in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, "Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class-organization of the proletariat to the organization of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans." [16]

Beyond its purely idealist response to material conditions of crisis and contradiction, Marx and Engels also critiqued Socialist Utopianism for seeking to transcend, through its visions and fantasies, the necessity of class struggle. Unlike communism, utopianism does not take sides in this struggle, but instead proposes that it can be avoided entirely. As Marx and Engels argued of the Utopian Socialists, "The undeveloped state of the class struggle, as well as their own surroundings, causes Socialists of this kind to consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms." [17]

Tafuri's discussion of the modern movement in architecture suggests that he found its utopianism open to the same line of critique as that leveled at Utopian Socialism by Marx and Engels. Modern architects, Tafuri argued, faced with the consequences of their marginalization, resorted to offering up architecture as an *alternative* to the now rejected project of revolution.[18] The project of averting revolution by means of architecture was encapsulated, for Tafuri, in the rhetoric of arch-modernist Le Corbusier: "It is the question of building which lies at the root of the social unrest of today; architecture or revolution." [19]

Capitalist development, meanwhile, continued apace through the application of the "plan of capital" through which it programmed its own democratic development.[20] Within this plan, argued Tafuri, there is no role to be found for architects in directly addressing the material conditions of the capitalist metropolis. Instead, and in a futile attempt to maintain a position of some social relevance, they resorted to offering up utopian visions of the city, "evolve[d] out of the human brain," to recall Engels's remarks.[21] And, like the visions of the Utopian Socialists, those of modern architects attempted to conjure away the real contradictions and crises of capital through the production of appearances. Following the philosopher Mario Tronti, Tafuri argued that there is no need in the "plan of capital" for ideology, yet modern architects cling to the ideology of utopia nonetheless. "Ideology," wrote Tafuri, "can only pass again through the same stages already passed, continually finding the highest form of itself in the form of the mediation of the contradiction.[22] The means through which contradiction is mediated by architecture, at the level of appearances, is that of form, described by Tafuri as a "Regressive Utopia." [23] After the Wall Street crash of 1929 and capitalism's consequent programs of planning and reform, all that remained to architecture was the "Utopia of form as a way of recovering the human totality through an ideal synthesis, as a way of

[15] Tafuri makes direct reference to both Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* and to Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific in Architecture and Utopia*. In a footnote on the inability of utopianism to effect revolutionary change and its historic tendency to function as an instrument of social democratic capitalism, he writes that "the theory of the 'revolutionary change' seen as necessary on Utopian grounds is revealed to be intimately related to social-democratic political practice, a fact easily verified by an attentive analysis of the history of the last fifty years." Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 53, n.30.

[16] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002 [1848]), 254.

[17] Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 255.

[18] "Architecture between 1920 and 1930 was not ready to accept such consequences. What was clear was its 'political' role. Architecture (read: programming [sic] and planned reorganization of building production and of the city as a productive organism) rather than revolution. Le Corbusier clearly enunciated this alternative." Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 100.

[19] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989), 269.

[20] Tafuri took the notion of the "plan of capital" from the militant workerist Marxism of Mario Tronti. As Tilo Amhoff notes: "It can for instance be argued that Tafuri's understanding of the plan is indebted to Mario Tronti's 'plan of capital.' For Tronti the 'plan of capital' was a consequence of the socialization of capital, of social capital. He writes: 'True, at this point there is no longer capitalist development without a capitalist plan. But there cannot be a plan of capital without social capital. It is the capitalist society that, by itself, programs its own development. And this is precisely democratic planning.' With the social organization of production and the new form and function of the state in the democratic planning of economy, the 'plan of capital' became the political institution for the self-organization and self-government of capital." See Tilo Amhoff, "Architecture as the Ideology of the Plan": Revisiting Manfredo Tafuri's Critique of Ideology," in *International Conference Architecture and Ideology Proceedings: September 28–29, 2012, Belgrade, Serbia* (Belgrade: Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, 2012), link.

[21] As Engels observed, "The solution of the social problems, which as yet lay hidden in undeveloped economic conditions, the Utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain." Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 24* (London and New York: Lawrence and Wishart/International Publishers, 1989), 290.

embracing disorder through order.”[24]

For Tafuri, the situation of architects by the 1960s, having learned nothing from the history of modernism, appeared especially exasperating. Architects had long since been relieved of their tasks as ideologues and planners and reduced to performing bit parts within the production of urban systems planned by and for capitalist development, though they still clung to the belief in their ideological role, as makers of utopia, mediators of contradictions. Now faced with “the worst of all evils,” noted Tafuri sarcastically, “the proletarianization of the architect and his [sic] insertion... within the planning programs of production,” architects turned to what they still supposed to be their most advanced weapons: the regressive utopianism of inventing forms and imagining futures.[25] Tafuri took this resort to “neurotic formal and ideological contortions” as indicative of the “political backwardness of this group of intellectuals.”[26] In both Europe and the United States, architects were no more able to countenance the situation in which they found themselves in the 1960s than they had been in the 1920s and ’30s. Made anxious by a technocratic usurpation of the ideological role they still somehow assumed to be theirs, architects revealed themselves, wrote Tafuri, to be “incapable of understanding historically the road travelled,” or the “consequences of the processes they helped set in motion.”[27]

Tafuri’s conclusion, arrived at through an historical account of the relationship between architecture and the emergence of capital, was that “there can never be an aesthetics, art or architecture of class, but only a class critique of aesthetics, art, architecture, and the city.”[28]

In issuing these infamous remarks, Tafuri was widely misunderstood to be declaring the death of architecture, but this was not his point. If we understand Tafuri as a socialist militant rather than as a cultural commentator—a figure working in the tradition and with the critical tools of Marx and Engels, and drawing as well on the militant Marxism of Mario Tronti—it becomes clear that his goal was to articulate a way for architects to contest the power of capital and to underline the importance of class critique as an essential tool in this contestation.[29] In this reading, so long as architectural workers fear proletarianization and resist its effects on their working lives—principally the ability it lends them to organize as workers in order to make demands of and extract concessions from capital—they will resort to regressive means to effect social change. What Tafuri teaches us is that fashioning images of utopia and fixating on formal innovation, even when undertaken in good faith, is ineffective as a means of producing meaningful societal transformation. Such practices only reinforce the articles of faith to which architects cling in a futile effort to persuade themselves of their agency. The maintenance of this faith in architecture as an autonomous agent of change and the threadbare image of social progress it serves up are what Tafuri understood as tragic—not architecture itself. This is the stark message delivered by Tafuri in *Architecture and Utopia*. It bears repeating now, nearly fifty years later.[30]

[22] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 60.

[23] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 41.

[24] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 48.

[25] Tafuri, “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology,” 31.

[26] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 178. Tafuri did not spell out here exactly which architects are guilty of these “neurotic formal and ideological contortions.” We might reasonably take this, given remarks made elsewhere in writing around this time, to be a generalized critique of the neo-avant-garde, including, for example, Archigram and Superstudio.

[27] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 178.

[28] Tafuri, “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology,” 32.

[29] We understand Tafuri to be a socialist militant not as a matter of “operative” convenience but as a matter of fact. Tafuri was associated with and inspired, in the writing of “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology” especially, by the militant and class struggle-based Marxism of Italian figures such as Antonio Negri, Mario Tronti, and Raniero Panzieri. Indeed, this essay was first published in the journal *Contropiano*, the theoretical arm of the Italian neo-Marxist movement known as “Workerism.” Tafuri’s interpreters, such as Fredric Jameson, Andrew Leach, and Marco Biraghi, have sought to depoliticize his writing by downplaying or overlooking his militancy, and to confine his work to purely intellectual and academic concerns. However, as Will Orr has examined at great length, this academic maneuver flies in the face of Tafuri’s own avowed militancy. Orr’s rigorously argued position is anticipated by Gail Day and Diane Ghirardo. Insisting, as we do, on the militancy of Tafuri in the works drawn upon here is not to be taken as an interpretive gesture within or for the history of architecture theory. The stakes are higher than that. From the limited perspective of architecture theory and history to which our view of Tafuri is typically confined he appears a fatalist, but from a political perspective addressed to the role of architecture within capitalism his message is instructive. See William Hutchins Orr, *Counterrealisation: Architectural Ideology from Plan to Project* (PhD thesis, Open University, 2019), link; Fredric Jameson, “Architecture and the Critique of Ideology,” in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2008); Andrew Leach, *Choosing History* (Ghent: A&S Books, 2007); Marco Biraghi, *Project of Crisis*, trans. Alta Price (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013); Gail Day, “Manfredo Tafuri, Fredric Jameson and the Contestations of Political Memory,” *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 1 (2012); and Diane Ghirardo, “Manfredo Tafuri and Architectural Theory in the United States, 1970–2000,” *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* (2002): 33.

For a Class Critique of Theory

It bears repeating now, that is, because the political wave upon which Tafuri's writing was riding was violently beaten back over the years that followed the publication of *Architecture and Utopia*.

Since then, the profession has clung ever more determinedly to the belief in its unique abilities to imagine utopias. It continues to stand, as well, by the belief that formal innovation will deliver us from the evils of the world, from environmental crisis, political strife, and social separation—and that the primary agency of architects lies in their ability to produce such formal innovations. Rather than having been cast aside in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, these beliefs have been given a new lease on life in, for example, post-crisis projects of urban regeneration.

To take one example, Lisbon's MAAT (Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology), designed by Amanda Leveté Architects and opened in 2016, is an undulating landscaped platform of a building that recalls earlier exercises such as Foreign Office Architects' South Coastal Park in Barcelona and Snhetta's Oslo Opera House.[31] The MAAT, designed for the EDP Foundation, a "private nonprofit institution" founded in 2004 by the energy company EDP, serves the company in promoting its avowed "commitment to promoting citizenship." [32] The formal qualities of the building are presented as the immediate means to bring about unbounded access, circulation, and exchange. Leveté has claimed that her architecture satisfies "the need for spaces that help us overcome the thresholds that could otherwise divide us." [33] While the image and experience of the MAAT building aims to speak of a cosmopolitan liberalism, the business of EDP profits from the labor of local call-center workers, confined to cubicles for long hours and employed on short-term contracts through third parties.[34] The ultimate effect of such architectural image-laundering, based as it is on the avowed belief that architecture can find formal solutions to societal contradictions, only enables the maintenance of these contradictions.

Utopia, in this sense, continues to perform the conciliatory ideological role with which Tafuri identified it in *Architecture and Utopia*. [35] As he showed, even when architectural design is undertaken as a means toward social democratic reform, as in the workers' settlements designed by Ernst May and Martin Wagner, it can only produce "realized utopias" by not engaging directly with the contradictions of capitalist development, but by creating isolated instances that suggest that things could be otherwise than they are. [36]

More cynically, and now in contemporary conditions of neoliberal capitalism and ongoing environmental catastrophe, architecture continues to provide forms and images suggesting that contradiction and crisis can be sublimated or obviated through recourse to architectural form. The architecture of Frank Gehry's Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris is a regressive utopia of self-expression and free circulation. The architecture of Bjarke Ingels's Oceanix, with its floating islands of offshore sustainable living, is a regressive utopia of eco-capitalism. While the utopian promise of such projects might be understood within the context of existing crises and contradictions—respectively, those of the race- and class-based inequalities of access to the city, and rising sea levels caused by ongoing climate change—they only succeed in

[30] In the preface to the English translation of *Architecture and Utopia* Tafuri clarified that in recognizing the political impotence of architecture in its current situation he was not issuing an "apocalyptic prophecy." We also want to note that Tafuri made clear in this preface that the path toward finding any new role for building as a "technology of the working class"—however remote from the immediate horizon—"cannot be achieved by presenting illusory hopes" (x).

[31] For a more detailed analysis of this project in relation to architectures of participation and the political economies of post-crisis Europe, see "Personifying Capital: Architecture and the Image of Participation," chap. 3 in Douglas Spencer, *Critique of Architecture: Essays on Theory, Autonomy and Political Economy* (Basel: Bauwelt Fundamente/ Birkhäuser, 2021).

[32] EDP Foundation Mission Statement, [link](#).

[33] Amanda Leveté, "There Has Never Been a More Important Time to Celebrate What Unites Us," *CNN Style*, September 14, 2017, [link](#).

[34] See Isabel Maria Bonito Roque, "Trade Unionism and Social Protest Movements in Portuguese Call Centres," *Journal of Labor and Society* 21 (2017).

[35] See Tafuri, "'Radical' Architecture and the City," chap. 5 in *Architecture and Utopia*, 104–124.

[36] Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 119.

showing that architects and their corporate sponsors can imagine things being otherwise. By offering an image of the supposedly exceptional, however, these designs sanction the status quo as the continuing rule.

While Tafuri considered architecture's continued attachment to beliefs in its imaginative and formal powers a rearguard action, what has been further historically clarified since the time of his writing is that the maintenance of this belief is also a means for architecture to shore up its own class privilege. Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia* is in some sense a history of architecture always being outmaneuvered by the larger historical forces it is trying to master, only to find itself ever more marginalized, and its professional status ever more precarious. Yet the conditions of neoliberal capitalism provide a different context in which to understand the historical unfolding of this relationship. In a plot twist Tafuri could not have anticipated, capitalism no longer plans for democratic reform and resorts, instead, to ideology to sustain its authority. There is an opportunity for architects, some architects, in this. They find themselves to be assets to capitalism, given license to produce purely formal utopias in ways they had not been for the best part of a century. This provides for a path to material prosperity for some, affording certain architects the possibility of resisting proletarianization and preserving their "expert" status.[37] A class critique of architecture today has also to reckon with the conditions of architectural production under neoliberalism, and how the class position of architectural workers is maintained through the institutions of architecture, its intellectual discourse, and the systems of licensure that differentiate some architectural workers from others.

A class critique of architecture today must consider, as well, the practice of architecture theory. In this respect the work of Gail Day and Diane Ghirardo is instructive. Day, in her 2012 essay, "Manfredo Tafuri, Fredric Jameson and the Contestations of Political Memory,"[38] reflected on the reception of Tafuri's thought in Anglo-American academia, and the turns by which its militant politics were effectively depoliticized. Day identified Fredric Jameson, especially in his essay "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology,"[39] as pivotal to this depoliticization. Jameson, Day argued, willfully misconstrues Tafuri's message as being issued from a politics of despair, with the latter then being charged by the former with "cultural pessimism." [40] He charges Tafuri's position as equivalent to that of postmodernist architecture, "content to juggle the pre-given tokens of contemporary reality." [41] Both are born, for Jameson, of the same "conviction that nothing new can be done, no fundamental changes can be made, within the massive being of late capitalism." [42] Marxian despair and postmodern playfulness are, for Jameson, two bad sides of the same dialectical coin.

What Jameson seeks to reintroduce to Tafuri's critique of architecture and ideology is the possibility of utopia, of a space apart from, but not in place of, the "massive being of late capitalism" in which hope survives: the "enclave." [43] It should be noted that the enclave, in Jameson's thought, is not a political strategy, but a purely theoretical proposition that would live only in critical thought and the cultural representations it might inspire. As Day observed:

[37] Under conditions of neoliberalism, formally inventive architecture finds itself a new economic niche in urban "place-making." Architecture, most emblematically that of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, comes to be valued as a key resource in a developing markets of interurban competition, especially as cities seek to shift their sources of revenue from industry to tourism. For a fuller discussion of the relations between such architectures and the development of new markets for architecture, see Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[38] Gail Day, "Manfredo Tafuri, Fredric Jameson and the Contestations of Political Memory," *Historical Materialism* 20.1 (2012), 31–77.

[39] Fredric Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 344–371.

[40] Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," 369.

[41] Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," 369.

[42] Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," 369.

[43] Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology," 367.

ON CLOSE ANALYSIS, IT TRANSPIRES THAT JAMESON DOES NOT, AS HAS BEEN WIDELY ASSUMED, EVEN ADVANCE ARGUMENTS FOR THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF “ENCLAVE BUILDING.” HE REVEALS THAT HE IS LESS INTERESTED IN THE POSSIBILITY OF ENCLAVES AS ACTUAL CHALLENGES TO SPATIAL HEGEMONY THAN HE IS IN PRESERVING JUST THE IDEA OF THEM. WHAT IS “ESSENTIAL,” HE ARGUES, IS “TO FORM CONCEPTIONS AND UTOPIAN IMAGES OF SUCH PROJECTS, AGAINST WHICH TO DEVELOP A SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF THEIR CONCRETE ACTIVITIES IN THIS SOCIETY.” JAMESON TURNS THE PROBLEM INTO ONE OF THE PRESERVATION OF CRITICAL THOUGHT AS SUCH, THAT IS, A PROBLEM OF REMEMBERING THE POSSIBILITY THAT OUR WORLD MIGHT BE OTHERWISE.[44]

[44] Day, “Manfredo Tafuri, Fredric Jameson and the Contestations of Political Memory,” 69.

Day’s trenchant critique of Jameson’s treatment of Tafuri can be taken even further. It is not just that Jameson depoliticizes Tafuri’s militancy by reconfiguring it into a proposal confined to the realms of theory and culture—a project that will exercise no impact on the material conditions of capitalism—but that theory and culture are sustained and valorized as the activities of a professional-managerial class through the depoliticizing translation of Tafuri’s militancy into a positive project for this class.[45] Theory and culture are taken by the professional-managerial class, in which architects may be included, as the means to accumulate economic and cultural capital. This holds, too, for the reception and appropriation of Tafuri in architectural culture—itsself substantially shaped by the writings of Jameson—as the basis for its own project, in which it can continue its fetishization of form and utopia while claiming for itself a position of autonomy from the forces and imperatives of capitalist production. As Diane Ghirardo remarked of this appropriation in her essay “Manfredo Tafuri and Architecture Theory in the US, 1970–2000” [46]: “What is remarkable is that the architectural theory machine in the United States ecstatically embraced Tafuri’s despair, deploying it as a trigger for a new architecture, while ignoring the political dimension fundamental to his critique.”[47] Ghirardo further elaborated on the role played by Peter Eisenman in transforming Tafuri’s politics of class critique into a project for an architecture of formal autonomy: “Peter Eisenman’s fascination with Tafuri was entirely self-interested... Amazingly, Eisenman continued to pursue Tafuri long after his death. In an article published in 2000, Eisenman twisted Tafuri’s arguments, about the autonomy of history and criticism from practice, to favor a view of architecture as autonomous from everything else.”[48]

[45] The term “professional-managerial class” (PMC) is not used by Tafuri. It was coined after the publication of *Architecture and Utopia*, by John and Barbara Ehrenreich in the essay “The Professional-Managerial Class,” in *Between Labor and Capital*, Pat Walker, ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 5–45.

[46] Ghirardo, “Manfredo Tafuri and Architectural Theory in the United States, 1970–2000,” 38–47.

[47] Ghirardo, “Manfredo Tafuri and Architectural Theory in the United States, 1970–2000,” 40.

[48] Ghirardo, “Manfredo Tafuri and Architectural Theory in the United States, 1970–2000,” 40.

Rescued and revived by Eisenman, architects’ attachment to formal experimentation would eventually find them work in historical conditions very different from those of Keynesian economic planning in which Tafuri wrote. In 1969, when “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology” was first published, the magazine *New Society* published the essay “Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom.”[49] Written by Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall, and Cedric Price, this essay was an early herald of the development of neoliberalism and its anti-planning rhetoric, in both politics and architecture. While Cedric Price’s work, as in his Fun Palace and Potteries Thinkbelt projects, anticipates an architecture of neoliberalism programmatically, it was not until the 1990s that

[49] Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall, and Cedric Price, “Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom,” *New Society* 338 (March 20, 1969).

architectural form came to align itself with the principles of neoliberalism. The folded, smooth-spaced, complex and novel forms of projects by Eisenman, Gehry, Zaha Hadid, OMA, Foreign Office Architects, and others are manifestations of the watchwords of neoliberalism: flexibility, adaptability, complexity. Moreover, the very novelty of form that certain architects were now able to deliver has been realized as monetary value in the context of the essentially neoliberal projects of speculative redevelopment, gentrification, and interurban competition it serves to promote.[50] Where Tafuri found the resort to formalism in his own era an ineffectual means to contest the imminent proletarianization of architecture, under more recent conditions the turn to formalism has proven effective toward other ends, namely those of architects professionally positioned to profit from neoliberal projects.[51] For the greater number of architectural workers, themselves increasingly subjected by their employers to the exploitative and precarious conditions of work under neoliberalism, however, the projects they labor on stand as both symbols and instruments of their own exploitation.[52]

No Longer Afraid

What Tafuri may not have been able to picture at the time of his writing is that the working conditions of professionals—and not just architectural workers—would deteriorate to the point where they would willingly choose to let go of the intellectual cachet of their profession and of the promise of creating a better world through form to align themselves with the working class writ large. We’ve seen organization and unionization happening in similarly white-collar contexts: newsrooms, university campuses, tech start-ups. This sort of self-organization and identification primarily as a worker, and then as a professional of one stripe or another, can be contagious, setting off ripple effects across industries. Despite the failed union drive at SHoP, workers in at least two other architecture firms in New York City are now unionizing.[53]

Such a step represents a move away from the protection of the architect’s status as a rarefied and specially qualified professional, relinquishing the idea that architectural workers might bring about societal change using exclusively the tools of their profession. On a personal level, this recalibration cannot be easy; it might require, for example, a shedding of the dream that any first-year intern can one day, too, become a firm owner. What has driven architectural workers (specifically at SHoP, but we can imagine that these conditions apply elsewhere) to unionization is the immediate goal of improving their working conditions and directly addressing inequalities: better hours, less stress, more pay. Such a move—to recognize themselves as workers and to organize on that basis—opens up possibilities for change that go far beyond the workplace. Once organized and willing to wield their power as workers, architectural workers could begin to realize a better world, instead of merely imagining one.

They could, for example, negotiate contracts that exclude work on prisons or detention centers. They could negotiate contracts that address racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination in the workplace, putting in place measures to help marginalized people be treated equitably and feel

[50] See Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[51] Where the specific trends associated with ideas of “smooth,” complex, and novel forms may have fallen out of favor as topics for discussion in architecture theory, they continue, and in highly profitable terms, to inform architectural design in its most high-profile iterations. See, for example, the new Beijing Sub-Center Library by Shnhetta, 2022; Heatherwick Studio’s proposed pier for the Seoul waterfront, 2022, the Shenzhen Maritime Museum by SANAA, 2021; Zaha Hadid Architects’ Eleftheria Square in Nicosia, Cyprus, 2021; MAD Architects’ One River North tower in Denver, Colorado, 2021; the Luma Arles Tower by Frank Gehry in Arles, 2021; and OMA’s Chengdu Future City Master Plan, 2021.

[52] For a recent critical account of labor practices in architecture, and how these are being contested in Europe, see Cortright, “*Can this be? Surely this cannot be.*” See too the article “Wages for Work: Future Architects Front Is Campaigning to End Exploitation of UK’s Architectural Assistants,” in which Amita Raja notes: “Anecdotal evidence of overwork and underpayment has been common knowledge in the architectural industry for some time. The COVID-19 pandemic’s adverse impact on precarious workers—those on zero-hours, part-time, agency, or temporary contracts—has exacerbated the effects of this toxic culture for architectural workers. A little over a year after the first lockdown was announced in the UK, architects are grappling with the compounded repercussions of unregulated furloughs and long-standing exploitative work practices.” *Architect’s Newspaper*, May 4, 2021, [link](#).

[53] Noam Scheiber, “Architects Are the Latest White-Collar Workers to Confront Bosses,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2021, [link](#).

supported, as opposed to surface-level “trainings” designed to comply with “diversity, equity, and inclusion” requirements that have become de rigeur but which produce few substantial results.[54] They could, by leaning on their professional expertise and leveraging their collective power, advocate for the nationalization of building codes, which dictate so much of what architects can design and what buildings look like. They could, in solidarity with other groups of organized workers, put pressure on governments and industries to win policies like the Green New Deal that greatly impact the work of architects and designers.

These are just a few examples. At this moment, the specifics of what could be done through the unionization of architectural workers matter less than the fact that such unionization is happening at all. In order to join hundreds of thousands of workers as part of a broader labor movement, architectural workers have had to both move past their conventional commitment to protecting their professional status and let go of the idea that the primary way they can make change in the world is through form. Rooted in an emergent class critique of architecture, and perhaps picking up threads that Tafuri laid down in his work half a century ago, this movement, we believe, does not spell the death of architecture but rather, in the long run, a new life for it.[55]

[54] J. C. Pan, “Workplace ‘Anti-Racism Trainings’ Aren’t Helping,” *Jacobin*, September 9, 2020, [link](#).

[55] We do not see class as the only category of oppression relevant to labor struggles. The exploitation of labor is compounded and often made easier by oppression on the basis of factors such as race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. We do hold that all forms of oppression are most effectively fought against through the collective and organized efforts of workers.