

*‘Absolute
Beginners’: The
Achievement
Society and the
Disenclosure of
the Architectural
Profession*

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In *The Burnout Society* (2010), philosopher Byung-Chul Han declared the transition from a ‘disciplinary society’ to an ‘achievement society’ in the twenty-first century.¹ Consequently, its members were no longer ‘obedience-subjects’ but ‘achievement-subjects’. Drawing on Foucault, Han suggested that the disciplinary society’s modal verbs were *May Not* and *Should*, indicating restrictions and compulsions. In contrast, the achievement society is characterised by the ‘positivity’ of attaining one’s potential. Its modal verb is the ‘unlimited *Can*’. With the positivity of *Can*, the limits of productivity in a disciplinary society are broken. The achievement-subject works faster and harder with an ‘imperative to achieve’. Rather than becoming free from domination, this subject gives oneself to a ‘compulsive freedom’ where they are free from constraints to maximise achievement, but this objective becomes the constraint itself. Thus, the achievement-subject auto-exploits — the perpetrator and the victim are one and the same. For Han, this ‘pressure to achieve’ results in exhaustion and depression: burnout.

Han’s diagnosis of contemporary society may seem familiar to the architectural profession today. The positivity of *Can* bleeds into almost all aspects of practice. Burning the midnight oil is part and parcel of learning what it means to gain experience and become an architect, particularly in ‘prestigious’ practices.² Participation in competitions — many of which provide no compensation for submissions — are

1 Byung-Chul Han and Erik Butler, *The Burnout Society*, (Stanford, California: Stanford Briefs, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2015), pp. 8–11.

2 For example, Professor Albena Yaneva’s ethnographic study of the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) constantly emphasised how designers would spend their ‘days and nights’ in the office. In particular, the production of OMA’s architectural models seems to be a leading culprit for ‘sleepless nights’. Albena Yaneva, *Made by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: An Ethnography of Design*, (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), pp. 10, 26, 66, 72, 89, 91; this seems to be common practice even today according to a more recent *Architect’s Journal* survey, see Ella Jessel, ‘AJ Investigation: Architectural Assistants Break Silence on Poor Working Practices’, (*Architects’ Journal*: EMAP Publishing Limited, 2021).

justified not only by the possibility of winning them, but for the intellectual exercises they provide.³ The potential for growth in an architect's career does not end as they leave the office, it continues with a plethora of side hustles — an interior design project on the side, an ideas competition with other co-conspirators, a design studio to teach, or an essay (like this) to write. Architectural production seems to be at an all-time peak. 'Fun' has been perversely co-opted by work. Exploitation is repackaged into an opportunity for personal growth in a time when unpaid internships and declining real wages are endemic to the profession.⁴ As we know, this has long diffused into the academy. Staying up till ungodly hours to perfect that drawing or model is considered a badge of honour — or even the minimum expectation — in architectural design studios.

To address this, Han re-introduced the concept of *Vita Contemplativa*, or the contemplative life, to relieve what he saw as excessive action. For Han, a slowness to action and an attention to one's environment were strategies to resist the pressures of the achievement-society. Drawing on his suggestion, I argue that architects need to pair this contemplation with the *disenclosure* of the discipline through the opening of history and by putting in common collective struggles. Contemplating about our profession and discipline necessarily involves knowledge of it. By engaging with history, architects understand the forces that have shaped the discipline and the profession. To demonstrate how essential this is, I turn to the work of Manfredo Tafuri and suggest that history can provide a mode of resistance against the positivity of the *Can* by revealing the exploitation that takes place behind the shroud of disciplinary interests. Furthermore, I assert that moving from contemplation to action is also necessary to

3 See Hélène Lipstadt, 'Are Competitions Populist? A Bourdieusian Alternative Perspective', in *What People Want: Populism in Architecture and Design*, ed. by Michael Shamiyeh (Basel: Birkhäuser Basel, 2005), pp. 133–49.

4 Richard Waite, 'Exclusive: Survey Reveals Architects Were Handed a Real Terms Pay Cut in 2023', (Architects' Journal: EMAP Publishing Limited, 2023).

break free from Han's 'paradigm of achievement'. Drawing on contemporary studies of architectural labour, I propose that addressing the positivity of the *Can* through collective efforts and labour organisation can address both the compulsions of the achievement-subject and the complicity of the architectural designer. If restraint and refusal have a place in the *disenclosure* of architecture, they must be collective.

If *disenclosure* is defined as the expansion of disciplinary interests and a resistance to the capitalist enclosure of land and the economy, the excess productivity of architects seems to have coincided with a *disenclosure* of the discipline in recent decades. More designers and students are actively exploring projects that address social injustices and environmental crises. In addition, the profession is no longer solely the domain of the gentleman elite as it becomes more inclusive to other non-hegemonic identities. These changes are perhaps most clearly substantiated by the theme of Lesley Lokko's Venice Biennale Architecture Exhibition (2023) which focused on decolonisation and decarbonisation.⁵ In the past decade, the Pritzker Architecture Prize, the profession's most prestigious award, was awarded to architects who have met a particular social or environmental need.⁶ While it is heartening that the discipline has pursued these urgent issues beyond its usual obsession with self-referentiality and form, this *disenclosure* of architecture does not necessarily mean that designers within these practices are able to avoid 'burnout' or exploitation.⁷

5 Lesley Lokko, 'Introduction to the Laboratory of the Future, the 18th International Architecture Exhibition', (Venice: Venice Biennale, 2023).

6 Some Pritzker Laureates include Shigeru Ban (2014), Alejandro Aravena (2016), Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal (2021), Diébédo Francis Kéré (2022).

7 Interestingly, the same people who have been celebrated by the Pritzker Prize for their socially conscious work have become known for their alleged exploitation of students and designers. Elemental, the architectural studio led by Aravena, announced it was ending its internship program in 2019 after criticism that it relied on unpaid interns in the past. London designer Adam Nathaniel Furman posted emails that were allegedly from Ban's office offering unpaid internships. See India Block, 'Elemental Ends Internships Amid Growing Row over Unpaid

Furthermore, many clients and projects today have yet to reflect this shift of demographic in registered architects and students. As such, greater production has also enabled architects to foray into dangerous territory. One might notice the parallel rise of the profession's involvement in socially and environmentally catastrophic projects. This excess of architectural production often finds itself in service to capital as it exacerbates environmental crises under the guise of sustainability, housing unaffordability, labour exploitation, and settler-colonialism, among many others.⁸ Architects seem ever more complicit in unrestrained exploitation, both as perpetrators and recipients. If one extends Han's theory in this way, the consequences of the achievement-subject's actions do not end with the auto-exploitation of the self — they are also inextricably linked with the oppression of others. The *disenclosure* of architecture must happen by addressing the positivity of *Can* if it is to transform not only in architecture's disciplinary interests, but also the profession and work of producing architecture.

The Project of the Achievement-Subject and the Contemplative Life

For Han, the formation of the achievement-subject is closely linked with capitalist relations of production.⁹ Remarking on its mechanics today, Han argued that capital's violence has become 'consensual'. What is dangerous about competition today is not the competition between individuals but the 'self-referentiality' of competition. The achievement-subject competes with herself as she attempts to outperform herself over and over. Instead of experiencing the disciplinary 'subjection' of the prohibitive

Work in Architecture Studios', (Dezeen, 2019); Warwick Mihaly, 'Redefining the Metrics of Success', (Australia: Parlour Collective, 2019).

⁸ See Reinier De Graaf, *Architect, Verb* (Verso, 2023), pp. ebook, 40–41; Natasha Iskander, *Does Skill Make Us Human?: Migrant Workers in 21st-Century Qatar and Beyond* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021).

⁹ Han and Butler, pp. 46–47.

superego, the achievement-subject ‘projects’ herself into the ‘ego ideal’. In doing so, she turns herself *into* a ‘project’ as she pursues the objective of closing the gap between her ‘real ego’ and ‘ego ideal’. This is what enables auto-exploitation. In contrast to the negative motivation of external domination, the achievement-subject is fed the illusion of freedom — she is free to maximise achievement. Indeed, Han claimed that this type of exploitation is considerably more effective and generates significantly higher returns because it takes place without external compulsion.¹⁰

It is not difficult to find parallels of this consensuality of auto-exploitation in contemporary architectural discourse. The architectural ‘project’ has long been fetishised.¹¹ Rather than a singular work of architecture, the ‘project’ can refer to the architect’s oeuvre which puts forth a certain principle of organising design.¹² This broader definition of the ‘project’ has a long history. Etymologically, the ‘project’ refers to something thrown forward. As historians Vera Keller and Ted McCormick noted, the term denoted a concept usually accompanied with an image or a plan drawing during the early modern period.¹³ Refusing to submit to the material and political limitations of the time and communicating their spiritual and material aspirations were crucial to the ‘project’ and their ‘projectors’ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁴ While ‘projects’ were criticised for their infeasibility in the eighteenth century, the possibility of private profit and public benefits helped make their risk more socially acceptable.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, the investment of — what

10 Ibid. p. 49.

11 See Pier Vittorio Aureli and Peter Eisenman, ‘A Project Is a Lifelong Thing; If You See It, You Will Only See It at the End’, *Log*, 28 (2013).

12 Ibid. p. 74; Sarah Whiting and Peter Eisenman, ‘I Am Interested in a Project of Engaged Autonomy’, *Log*, 28 (2013).

13 Vera Keller and Ted McCormick, ‘Towards a History of Projects’, *Early Science and Medicine*, 21 (2016), pp. 426–33.

14 Ibid. p. 429.

15 Ibid. p. 435.

may be loosely defined as — capital was key to any ‘project’.

This remains true today as the concept of the ‘project’ acquired contemporary meaning. In conversation with Peter Eisenman, the architect Pier Vittorio Aureli discussed the success of various ‘projects’ of architects in *Log 28*. For them, the ‘project’ was what the architect ought to devote herself to. Surpassing the value of any single work of architecture, Aureli argued that this was a ‘lifelong undertaking’ which required ‘years of accumulation of things’.¹⁶ As Eisenman noted, these ‘projects’ of early modernist architects relied on clients and therefore, capital.¹⁷ Aureli concurred, observing that contemporary projects involved a massive ‘financial operation’. In other words, to a certain extent, the ‘project’ relied on capital. But what if this formulation was turned around? What if capital relied on the ‘project’? What was missing in their dialogue was how architects were themselves instrumentalised by capital as they composed their ‘project’ as recent scholarship has shown.¹⁸ This drive towards formulating a ‘project’ presupposes the architect transforming *into* a project as Han observed.¹⁹

Aside from actual commissions of architecture, the architectural competition is another important site for developing a ‘project’. In her chapter for *What People Think* (2005), cultural historian Hélène Lipstadt argued that competitions turned the

16 Aureli and Eisenman, p. 72.

17 Ibid. p. 75.

18 See Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Graaf.

19 In an interview with students at the Yale School of Architecture, Architect Robert A.M. Stern urged young architects to ‘work in an established practice and learn as much as possible before launching into independent practice. In other words, turn off the earbuds and listen to what’s being said around you, try to be at every meeting, and keep pushing your superiors to take you with them — do whatever it takes to see what’s going on, to learn, and to be aware.’ See Robert A.M. Stern, ‘Interview with Robert Stern’, in *Perspecta*, 47: Money, ed. by James Andrachuk, et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), p. 43.

economic world ‘upside-down’.²⁰ By participating in them, architects could ‘operate as if they enjoyed a very considerable degree of autonomy’ like artists.²¹ Architects were allowed to make grand gestures and, like projectors of the past, set aside the material and political limitations temporarily. As Lipstadt observed, they may not be rewarded with actual commissions but could gain the respect and admiration of their peers. While Lipstadt saw the open competition as a moment of liberation for architects, it is precisely where the ‘freedom’ of the achievement-subject to maximise achievement — and hence, auto-exploit, thrives.²²

It is worth comparing the structure of the design studio — and the MArch thesis — in architecture schools to the format of the competition. Students learn by developing a hypothetical project while critics serve as jurors. The reproduction of architectural labour is predicated on this form of auto-exploitation. It is thus no accident that SCI-Arc faculty in California would recommend students take up ‘side-hustles’ while also committing to working long hours and going the ‘extra mile’.²³

Given how familiar Han’s diagnosis must feel to our discipline, what is to be done? *Vita Contemplativa* was the closest thing to a solution that Han proposed. This concept may be traced back to Greek philosophy, but Han concentrated on Arendt’s modern interpretation. In her seminal book *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt differentiated between the three categories of *Vita Activa: labour, work, and action*.²⁴ *Labour* was defined as

20 Lipstadt, pp. 139–40.

21 Ibid. pp. 139–40.

22 Not to mention that this covers up the immense machinery of labour that takes place behind the awards and accolades. Behind the ‘project’ of an architect are many other ‘projects’ of her assistants in the office.

23 Katherine Guimang, ‘Controversy at Sci-Arc over Labor Practices Leads to Faculty Members Placed on Leave. Isolated Incident or a Wake up Call for the Industry at Large?’, (Archinect, 2022).

24 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 7.

the activity required for biological survival. *Work* resulted in a usable ‘thing’ shaped by instrumentalism. For Arendt, *action* was the most important component of *Vita Activa*. Through their ‘actions and speech’, she argued, individuals demonstrate their uniqueness, revealing their distinct personalities to the world.²⁵ Towards the end of her book, Arendt suggested that modern society was replacing both *action* and *work* with *labour*.²⁶ It demanded its members to reduce other forms of activity into ‘a sheer automatic functioning’. In other words, labour, the activity needed for subsistence, was increasingly all that was possible.

Reflecting on *The Human Condition*, Han suggested that Arendt’s emphasis on *Vita Activa* was misplaced, especially when considered in the context of the late-modern achievement-society.²⁷ Far from simply encouraging labouring, capital *fostered* the individuality of the contemporary achievement-subject. Instead of the reduction of human activity to labour that Arendt predicted, Han claimed that hyperactivity characterised the achievement-society. This ‘hyperactive intensification’ led to a ‘hyperpassivity’ as the achievement-subject acted on every ‘impulse or stimulus’ in service to capital.²⁸

Seen in this light, *thinking* surpassed *acting* in its ‘capacity’ for human *action*. For Han, the decline in ability to contemplate contributed to an overemphasis in an active life and the plight of the achievement-subject. As such, *Vita Contemplativa* required one to be both selective of their actions and in attention to things. Drawing on Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*, Han argued for the importance of developing deep and contemplative attention to one’s surroundings by ‘learning to see, to think, and to speak and write’.²⁹ Learning to ‘see’ involved becoming accustomed

25 Ibid. pp. 176–77.

26 Ibid. p. 322.

27 Han and Butler, p. 17.

28 Ibid. p. 22.

29 Ibid. pp. 14, 21.

to calmness and patience. This meant allowing for a long and deliberate observation of things — an active resistance to intrusive stimuli rather than a passive acceptance of everything.

Engaging with the Historical Project as an Architect

Alongside Han's suggestion of contemplation, I argue that we must return to history to understand the conditions we have inherited. This position is not new. In contrast to the active and operative architectural 'project', architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri proposed an engagement with the historical 'project'. In 'The Building of Tension' (2007), architectural historian Teresa Stoppani succinctly summarised how Tafuri's *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* (1980) laid out this historical 'project' as a construct that remained open to redefinition.³⁰ Rather than being static, history is shaped by the objects it examines while also influencing the realities it deconstructs and then reconstructs. For Tafuri, there was no single linear history, but multiple threads that collided and tangled. Stoppani concludes that the objective of the historian is to trace the entanglements of the many independent histories.

Of course, Tafuri was interested in the relationship between capital and the architectural 'project'. Through his Marxist critique of capitalist development, Tafuri showed how history is an essential analytical tool to understand the conditions in which we practise. This awareness and analysis of history is precisely what needs to take place concurrently with Han's contemplation. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's 'The Author as Producer' (1934), Tafuri later argued that architecture must be examined in its loci

30 Teresa Stoppani, 'The Building of Tension - Manfredo Tafuri's Legacy: From Operative Criticism to Historical Project, between Critical Practices and Material Practices in Architecture', in *Reflections on Creativity: Exploring the Role of Theory in Creative Practices*, ed. by Hamid van Koten and Lorens Holm (Dundee, Scotland, UK: Duncan of Jordanstone College, 2007), pp. 1–17 (pp. 9–10).

of production.³¹ History allowed him to understand the terms in which architecture was complicit with capitalist exploitation. In other words, Tafuri needed critical distance from practice to muster a critique of the contemporary.³² An independent historical analysis could not be contaminated by or subservient to the objectives of contemporary practice, and its theories.³³ This is precisely why a retreat to history is crucial.

In his *Contropiano* essay ‘Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology’ (1969) which was later expanded into *Architecture and Utopia* (1976), Tafuri contended that the modern dilution of Enlightenment utopianism in architectural theory was connected to the rise of the ‘modern movement’.³⁴ The fall of social utopianism in the early nineteenth century marked the acceptance of architects to the new order of the capitalist city. For Tafuri, architecture was the first discipline to accept the reverberations of the resulting commodification because it was ‘directly linked to the reality of production’.³⁵ Furthermore, he argued that the crisis of modern architecture — the inability to achieve its demands of rationalisation in cities — stemmed from its surrender to industrial capital. He astutely pointed out that the diagnosis of crisis by modern architectural historians of his time neglected the international reorganisation of capital that took place under the influences of economist John Maynard Keynes and *The General Theory of Employment* (1936).³⁶ For Tafuri, this moment is pivotal as architecture relinquishes its role as the ‘stimulus to the structures of production’.

31 Ibid. pp. 7-8.

32 Tafuri, of course, later declared that ‘there is no such thing as critique, only history’. Richard Ingersoll and Manfredo Tafuri, ‘There Is No Criticism, Only History’, *Casabella* (1995).

33 Stoppani, p. 6.

34 K. Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998), pp. 6–15.

35 Ibid. p. 15.

36 Ibid. pp. 28-29; for a study on the impact of this in the Global South, see *Aggregate, Architecture in Development: Systems and the Emergence of the Global South*, 1st edn (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2022).

What followed was an avant-garde criticism that served as a tool for the capitalist world, functioning within the cycles of production rather than outside of it.³⁷ The consequences of this surrender extended to the modern profession, resulting in the ‘proletarianization’ of the architect and her subjugation *within* planning programs.³⁸ Tafuri argued that architects were unable to explicate the very historical developments that they were complicit in producing. As such, they rebelled against their decline as influencers of the urban environment without addressing the fundamental problems of the capitalist system.

For Tafuri, it was essential that architects were well-versed in the history of their discipline so that they could effectively implement changes for the future. This does not mean that all architects interested in *disenclosure* should now become historians. However, for *disenclosure* to happen in the architectural profession, architects must engage with history to confront the complex problems they hope to address. This means doing the unseen work of reading widely and deeply. In the achievement-society where maximising production is celebrated, this is easier said than done. If your reputation as an architect depends on your actions — an award-winning building, a prized competition entry, or a stunning visualisation — then the very acts of knowledge-accumulation and contemplation are seemingly counter-productive. That said, following Tafuri’s critique, it is essential that architects do so to reclaim our disciplinary autonomy. As architect and architectural historian Sarah Whiting argued in *Log*, it is crucial for academics to be concerned with the state of practice as much as the inverse.³⁹ The investigations of architectural theory and history in academia must remain relevant to architects, particularly in the pursuit of *disenclosure*.

37 Hays, pp. 30–31.

38 Ibid. p. 31.

39 Whiting and Eisenman, p. 112.

While contemplation and engaging with history are important components of *disenclosing* the discipline of architecture, action — through the organisation of labour — remains essential to tackling the positivity of *Can* in professional labour, particularly for those occupying more precarious positions. The professional gatekeeping of the chartered — or licensed — architect needs to be *disenclosed* to acknowledge the significant labour produced by (unlicensed) architectural designers that support the work of the chartered architect.⁴⁰ Furthermore, if professional associations of architects have failed to regulate unethical practices and commissions, then the collective organisation of emerging architects and designers is necessary to steer firms away from being complicit in socially and environmentally catastrophic projects.⁴¹

Thus far, professional associations have largely been ineffective in institutionalising much-needed changes to the working conditions of architectural labour.⁴² The Future Architects' Front (FAF) criticised the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in a 2021 open letter for its failure to protect the interests of architectural designers and regulate the unethical actions of its chartered members.⁴³ The American Institute

40 It may be important to note that in the United States of America, non-Hispanic whites add up to about ninety-one percent of all registered architects. As such, those who hold an architectural licence (white) and those who do not (non-white) are extremely uneven, highlighting the exploitation of those more vulnerable to racial capitalism. See Betsy del Monte, 'Equity & Justice in Architecture', (Dallas: AIA Dallas, 2020).

41 In *The Disappearance of Rituals* (2020), Byung-Chul Han reflects on the disintegration of community as rituals fade away with the increasing 'atomization' of individuals in society. While Han asserts that his book is not an argument to return to past rituals, he underlines the importance of collective feelings. Is it possible to see designers not just as a collective of workers but also as associations with shared design values?

42 Bassem Saad, 'Betraying the Profession: Design Labour against Technocracy', *Failed Architecture*, 2020.

43 Future Architects' Front, 'An Open Letter to the Royal Institute of British

of Architects (AIA) has performed no better with minimal commitments to protect the wages of emerging architects and a general timidity to advocate for architects after the 1972 and 1990 antitrust directives.⁴⁴ As a result, the profession has struggled to attract and retain minorities in both countries.⁴⁵ As such, in recent years, there have been increased calls for labour organisation in the architectural profession — though this has been met with fierce opposition.⁴⁶

In ‘Betraying the Profession’ (2020), writer Bassem Saad argued that a ‘betrayal’ and ‘disidentification’ of professional values is necessary because of this gross neglect of the precarious conditions designers face. According to them, the designer is ‘conditioned’ to identify with the professional designer class throughout their education and career in architecture. In other words, the achievement-subject is also cultivated by the profession. Saad described what might be considered typical of an architectural designer starting their career:

The designer may be currently precariously employed in the lower rungs of a firm whose grip on a sustainable inflow of commissions is tenuous, but she is surely to advance with the *necessary investment of overtime, self-discipline, and self-initiated competition entries*. She must therefore identify with her boss, and both must do their part to defend the value of the design profession.⁴⁷

Architects (RIBA)’, 2021. See also Amrita Raja, ‘Future Architects Front Is Campaigning to End Exploitation of U.K.’s Architectural Assistants’, 2021.

44 Peggy Deamer, Keefer Dunn, and Manuel Shvartzberg Carrió, ‘A Response to AIA Values’, *Avery Review*, 23 (2017); Peggy Deamer, *Architecture and Labor*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2020).

45 Michael J. Armstrong, ‘NCARB by the Numbers’, (United States of America: National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, 2018), p. 58.

46 Noam Scheiber, ‘Architects Are the Latest White-Collar Workers to Confront Bosses’, *New York Times*, 2021; Daniel Jonas Roche, ‘Snøhetta Named in an Unlawful Discrimination Suit by Architectural Workers United after Unsuccessful Union Drive’, *The Architects’ Newspaper*, 2023.

47 Saad. Emphasis added by author.

As ‘overtime’ and ‘self-initiated projects’ are symptomatic of the positivity of *Can*, Saad’s observation demonstrates how the auto-exploitation of the architectural designer has been internalised in architectural work through professional ‘solidarity’. Saad warned that this perspective led to a slippery slope of auto-exploitation and the dismissal of the designer’s precarious reality:

Solidarity is presumed to exist and flourish, if at all, on the grounds of shared profession. In this sense, over-identification with a professional class of designers coincides with the tendency for designers to see their work as a ‘calling,’ and both cases end up dismissing the material realities of most design workers.⁴⁸

As architect Marisa Cortright asserted in *Failed Architecture*, it is a mistake to treat becoming an architect as a ‘calling’ because it has justified the poor treatment of workers.⁴⁹

Disenclosing the profession means accounting for the precarious conditions emerging designers face. If Han’s suggestion of *Vita Contemplativa* is impossible when architectural jobs are precarious, architectural designers are overworked, and working environments are toxic, then Saad’s rejection of the profession, and call for alternative associations and organisation is a necessary next step to reduce the prevalence of exploitative working conditions. Concurrently, supporting organisations like the FAF, the Section of Architectural Workers, and the Architectural Lobby could play a crucial role in advocating for emerging architectural designers. Furthermore, the successes and failures of these organisations could be documented, creating an ‘archive’ or methodology of organising as some organisations

48 Ibid.

49 Marisa Cortright, ‘Death to the Calling: A Job in Architecture Is Still a Job’, *Failed Architecture*, 2019.

have already begun doing.⁵⁰ While this may not stop an individual from indulging in auto-exploitation, organising labour could resist its normalisation in professional settings.

Disenclosing the Profession

If the disenclosure of the architectural profession is to happen, it is necessary that architects address the positivity of the *Can* in our achievement-society. The excess productivity generated by the achievement-subject needs to be curbed to reduce the architect's complicity and self-exploitation. In this essay, I have put forth several strategies of restraint and refusal. Through Han's reintroduction of *Vita Contemplativa*, the individual must learn to be selectively attentive, refraining from hyperactivity. By revisiting the work of Tafuri, I proposed that engaging with history is a necessary step to understanding the development and conditions of our profession, particularly its relationship to capital. Lastly, by drawing on Saad's rejection of professional associations, I highlighted the importance of collective action, especially when labour is precarious. These strategies imply greater collaboration between academia and practice as well as the collective organisation of architectural labour. The disenclosure of architecture should encompass not only a broadening of its disciplinary interests but also a reconsideration of professional conditions. For this to happen, the architect must acquire both self-awareness and the capacity for action. The lyrics of David Bowie's 'Modern Love' (1983) are fitting: 'I know when to go out | Know when to stay in | Get things done.'

⁵⁰ Citygroup in New York City has been at the frontlines resisting gentrification in Chinatown. The Chinatown Working Group have created their own 'archive' as a documentation of their efforts which can be used for other similar efforts. See Chinatown Working Group, 'Archive' <<https://www.chinatownworkinggroup.com/archive>> [accessed 21 June 2024].

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