

**After the hyperprofessional. A manifesto (ongoing).** It's time for designers to deprofessionalize. What does it mean and how would it work to open "architecture" up to include non-licensed design and building practices; to expand "landscape architecture" to include landscape maintenance, installation, and gardening?<sup>1</sup> Deprofessionalization in this context doesn't necessarily mean deregulation or an end to licensure, but rather a shift away from existing hierarchical structures of patronage and careerism.<sup>2</sup> It signals a design work beyond technical solutionism and a design practice outside of individual ambition.



We propose a shift to the mutual aid organized by workers in other professionalized spheres to share their knowledge and labor in non-hierarchical, non-exploitative ways (eg: Tilted Scales Collective, street medics).<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> We call for a deprofessionalized theory and practice that embraces community care as a tenet of spatial design, instead of one that views community input as a sometimes-important but always external influence on the work of specialists.<sup>6</sup> We call for reflections on the problems of professional status as well as the opportunities that its structures (eg: licensure) afford to design workers at its margins. We call for case studies in the alternative organization of resources and space that makes mutual aid possible. We call for explorations of mutual aid and direct action as aesthetic and affective practices, "simultaneously profoundly foolish and utterly serious."<sup>7</sup>

Professional design under global capitalism has produced a category of architectural designer-as-technocrat, which we can call the hyperprofessional, whose contributions are not only aesthetic but administrative. More than just a charismatic schmoozer, the hyperprofessional is a sort of anti-democratic social practitioner. His skill lies not only in his ability to navigate smoothly through the political systems of the neoliberal city, but in capitalizing on their very opacity to developers, politicians, and the general public. By positioning himself as a uniquely adept interpreter of the parameters of public urban space, the hyperprofessional establishes himself as an indispensable intermediary between developers, city agencies, and "the community." The success of this figure shows us that professional architectural work has already decoupled from architectural licensure. The hyperprofessional has no need for licensure, except as a tool wielded tactically by a subordinated local practitioner. His aims are global and licensure is always local. Ironically, this figure demonstrates that interpreting and navigating regulatory

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<sup>1</sup> Raxworthy, Julian. *Overgrown: Practices between Landscape Architecture & Gardening*. MIT Press, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Parman, John J. "Is Architectural Licensing Necessary?" Common Edge, 2020, [commonedge.org/is-architectural-licensing-necessary/](https://commonedge.org/is-architectural-licensing-necessary/)

<sup>3</sup> INCITE! *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. South End Press, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Spade, Dean. *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. Verso, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Nakad, Julia. "Care for Where There Is No Justice: The modern history of street medics and how they support social movements," Hesperian Health Guides, 6 Jan. 2016, <https://hesperian.org/2016/01/06/care-for-where-there-is-no-justice-the-modern-history-of-street-medics-and-how-they-support-social-movements/>

<sup>6</sup> Bliss, Laura. The High Line's Next Balancing Act, Bloomberg CityLab, 7 Feb. 2017, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-07/the-high-line-and-equity-in-adaptive-reuse](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-07/the-high-line-and-equity-in-adaptive-reuse).

<sup>7</sup> Graeber, David. *Direct Action: an Ethnography*. AK Press, 2009.

systems can be both sustaining work and aesthetic practice. The hyperprofessional funnels these goals through the existing structures of global capital; can an anti-capitalist design invert his proprietary attitude, sharing and receiving knowledge freely rather than guarding it jealously?

Hyperprofessionals loom large in the public imagination by design. But the rise of the hyperprofessional is only one symptom of the broader scarcity thinking that neoliberalism compels: one which tells us we must fight over scraps rather than work collectively to piece them together. That thinking drives the technocratic solutionism that pervades design education, as well as the structural impediments to livable design work like tuition costs and the continued reliance on underpaid labor like uncompensated overtime, unpaid internships, and volunteer work.<sup>8</sup> These are mechanisms through which trained designers inherit and claim a careerist, technocratic mindset. They are evidence of a broad and destructive attitude of hyperprofessionalism within the design fields. Professionalized designers, regardless of licensure, succeed through a network of relationships enacted through exclusive design schools, client relationships, and publications. These structures confer legitimacy to their participants and deny it to outsiders. They allow designers to sidestep accountability to the public by claiming specialized expertise and unassailable motives. Conversely, designers' managerial-class ambitions hinder our ability to understand ourselves as both workers and community members.<sup>9</sup> These structures cannot produce good design.

The era of the designer-technocrat must come to an end. In an era of both widespread governmental failure and widely successful mutual aid and community care, we believe in the urgency and the promise of deprofessionalizing design. The era of redistributive spatial design has already begun. The question now is: will architecture participate?

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<sup>8</sup> Holmes, Rob. "The Problem with Solutions." Places Journal, 1 July 2020, [placesjournal.org/article/the-problem-with-solutions/](https://placesjournal.org/article/the-problem-with-solutions/).

<sup>9</sup> Deamer, Peggy. *The Architect as Worker: Immaterial Labor, the Creative Class, and the Politics of Design*. Bloomsbury Press, 2015.