

## Gift economies in architecture

This issue of **arq** opens with Christopher Platt's reflections on four houses designed by studioKAP, the firm that he co-directs (pp. 106–126). Platt inquires into architecture's abilities to transform the place it occupies, and the transformation of architecture by that place. 'Could site itself be a gift to an architectural project', he asks, 'and could the same project return the favour to the site with unexpected and welcome qualities?'. Platt evokes implicitly the notion of gift economy, which was developed through the work of anthropologists such as Jonathan Parry, particularly inspired by the idea of online trading communities. In gift cultures, exchanges are made but not directly monetised. Goods or services are given without the expectation of immediate or future reward. This is the relationship between architecture and site that Platt advocates: where architect and architecture benefit from the qualities and characteristics of the place, given without debt, and where a site is remade for the better through its transactions with thoughtful architecture.

The civic quality of public space, Lorens Holm and Cameron McEwan assert (pp. 179–194), is constituted in – and between – architecture and language, and it becomes qualified through non-transactional exchanges. 'The challenge for architecture', they suggest, is 'to explore new forms of collective consciousness in an age of commodity capitalism.' They advocate the spirit of civic exchange without the expectation of reward. Aaron Cayer and Catherine Tsukasa Bender address similar themes in their article, recounting cultural conflicts surrounding historical attempts to redesign Tokyo's Miyashita Park (pp. 167–178). Normative processes of top-down redevelopment there – they show – have been repeatedly challenged by art activists, whose projects and events celebrate a non-transactional gift culture, which in turn proposes an alternative idea of what the public, and public space, might be.

Relatedly, Tino Mager discusses the vexed idea of authenticity in architectural heritage (pp. 137–148). In discussions about heritage value – particularly with regard to modernist heritage – he argues that 'authenticity is [often] a freely available attribute, not strictly attached to the material authenticity of the building in question'. He thus identifies an economy in ideas of authenticity, where authenticity is bestowed as a kind of gift, only partially linked to the actuality of architectural fabric. Meanwhile, Robert Grover, Stephen Emmitt, and Alex Copping (pp. 149–156) claim the idea of the building type as a language, 'liberat[ing] the concept from its purely analytical origins yet protect[ing] it from the risk of model formation'. 'Accepting type', they argue, 'the architect cannot arbitrarily assign or remove meaning but must communicate [...] through received conventions.' A metaphorical connection can be made here with the idea of a gift economy, with respect to the dialogue between specific architectural projects and their categorisations according to type, and between architectural analysis and design.

This issue of **arq** engages with both direct and metaphorical reflection on the role of gift economies in architecture. The notion seems particularly appealing in our field, where architects struggle to articulate qualitative values in cultures that tend to prefer quantitative metrics, around cost, programme, and risk, for example – because it acknowledges value that isn't immediately transactional or instrumental.

THE EDITORS