



Ardeth

A magazine on the power of the project

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Money

**Juliet Odgers (Editor), Mhairi McVicar (Editor),
Stephen Kite (Editor), *Economy and Architecture***

Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 284 pp. – 2015

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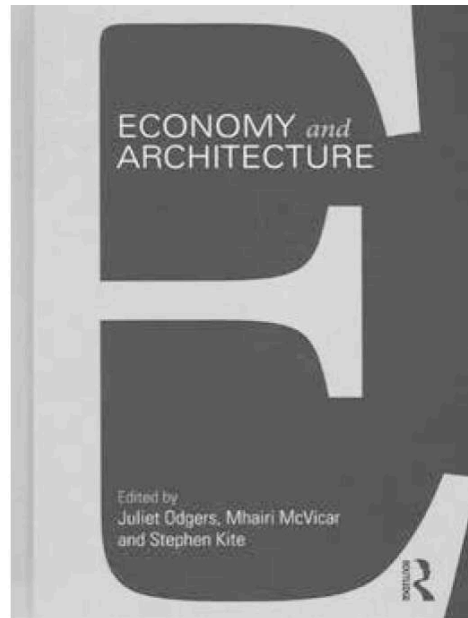
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- 1 “We are all too aware, as any practising architect must be, that a skilful engagement with the exigencies of market, money and price are necessary not only in running a successful practice but also in “procuring” a building” say the editors of the volume “Economy and Architecture”, who indeed move entirely within the architectural realm as instructors and critics. This statement is the starting point for a broad reflection about the combination of budget concerns, management pressures and market feedbacks that the architect’s profession underpins. However, the different contributors to the volume also attempt at conveying a more optimistic attitude: even if architecture is strictly



connected with the market in economic terms, the volume in its entirety also shows that architectural professionals can challenge the rules of the game by means of the creative potential of their designs and practices. Revolving around this central theme, the book implicitly rejects a unique and universal understanding of the term “economy” itself, which would reduce architecture to a simple commodity that strictly follows market patterns. On the contrary, the book explores a more complex and broader notion of economy, one that from the ancient origin of the term re-frames the connections between the *oikos*, which fundamentally is intended as the basic social unit, either in terms of family or community, and its spaces managed with the work of designers.

- 2 The book is divided into four main thematic sections – Defining household, Negotiating value, Managing production, Politics and economy – each one hosting five different contributions that were previously presented at an international conference held at the Welsh School of Architecture in July 2011. Even though a clear relationship between the four parts of the book is not made explicit, each section explores a specific economic sphere of economy from a multitude of perspectives and case studies. This incredible variety of essays, set in very different historical and geographical contexts, surely deserves the reader’s attention as it mirrors the mutable nature of the relationships between architecture and economy – or the unstable character of capitalism itself, paraphrasing Peggy Deamer’s masterpiece (2014) “*Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present*”. Yet the volume “Economy and Architecture” attempts at expanding the critical perspective prior to modern capitalism and liberal markets, including essays devoted to earlier time than the 19th century.
- 3 Three further considerations should be added, though. Firstly, the volume includes contributions made both by architectural practitioners and by scholars of architecture and urban studies, as well as writings by ethnographers and sociologists. At any rate, no works by economists have been included in the assortment of essays, which is both challenging and possibly questionable.

- 4 Secondly, the book provides a clear holistic understanding of the relationships between architectural design and the marketplace. The whole volume confutes the value of design and architecture as strictly economic and completely measurable in terms of performance; alternatively, essays argue for a multifaceted set of values involved in the process of architectural production and highlight how such values are continuously negotiated among different actors and in different situations. Thirdly, to conclude, the book positions among the multitude of investigations on the fringe of architectural design disciplinary boundaries and, even if in fitful way, sheds light into the implications of reading and understanding architectural practice from other fields of inquiry.
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