THE CONTRIBUTIONS PRESENTED THUS far have highlighted either specific costs of architectural practice or the potential benefits, or the lack thereof, of adopting particular work configurations. One could say, however, that there is a whole different dimension to the work of the architect, which has to do with the actual or perceived value of what is produced, irrespective of the costs associated or the technology utilised. The things we exchange in any market are called goods for a reason: they are expected to satisfy some type of want, thereby producing a benefit of some sort.

Buildings constitute a uniquely complex form of durable goods—long-lasting, long-performing artefacts, that is, which embed multiple types of usefulness. But how does one define value? Is it an absolute concept or a relative one? Do architects create value autonomously, or do they create it by responding to specific requests? Classical economic doctrine tells us that there are two types of value: use value and exchange value. Use value represents the pleasure a commodity actually generates for its owner/user; exchange value denotes the quantity of other commodities, or more usually money, a commodity can be swapped for.

Yet, in both cases, the quantification of value defies absolute categories: the perceived value of something and by extension its price is not permanently embedded in it; rather, it depends on the degree of what is called marginal utility—the extra satisfaction, that is, gained from a small increment in the consumption or the acquisition of that something, at a particular time and under particular circumstances. Attributing value, in other words, is equivalent to rating the benefit of a decision relative to others.

This is the sense of Adam Smith's famous paradox of water and diamonds: if we were in the centre of Melbourne, access to drinking water would be plentiful and therefore relatively cheap, and no one would swap a bottle with diamonds. If we were lost in the desert, however, we'd happily give all our riches for some fluids. Without water, in fact, we would not be able to enjoy our diamonds for long.

By the same token, the attribution of design and/or building value may depend on the type of society one lives and works in, and the type of needs that ought to be satisfied within that environment. Yet, stakes and objectives vary even across social groups; and, since buildings are complex artefacts, part of a multi-layered production environment and the result of a mesh of social transactions, they embody possibly conflicting interests and diverse costs. Presence and location of value, in this case, depend on whom one asks. As *TAKE 5* editors, we decided to ask Michael Benedikt, the author of a vast theoretical work on value and architecture. In particular, we were interested in his thoughts about the social construction of building value, and how this may help architects' ability to generate value in design.

MICHAEL BENEDIKT The Ghost of Gresham: Economics, architecture, and the progressive loss of designed value.

Architects and economics

Economics is the study of exchange involving money and goods, where the goods in question might be material things, energy, knowledge, information, work, time, or money itself in some other package or form. In all of this, economics casts one party as the seller and the other as the buyer. Often the first is also a producer; usually the second is also a consumer. Then there are brokers, agents, regulators, and so on. We are all familiar with the terms.

As architects, we do not typically think of economics as a creative discipline or as something we could learn from. We certainly don't teach economics in architecture school. This is a pity, and not just for practical reasons. Reading economic philosophers like Adam Smith, Karl Menger, William Jevons, Karl Marx, J.M. Keynes, Vilfredo Pareto, Friedrich von Hayek, John Kenneth Galbraith, even Paul Samuelson, is a great pleasure. How ardently they grapple with human beings' dual desire to profit and to do good! And with what charm they combine rhetoric and mathematics, speculation and observation, to model what happens when thousands of individuals act to realise these dual ambitions, partially independently, partially in imitation of one another, and partially bound by the rules of changing social and technological regimes!

For architects, however, economics enters the professional milieu as a spoiler of dreams, a constraint, a sorry ambition. Anything good or interesting that we propose is sure to cost more than the average client is willing or able to pay, and certainly more than the average client's average taste would require in order to be happy *enough*. But how does this happen? Is it because we are too rigid, too ambitious, or too sophisticated? Or is it because the logics of the context in which we practice run counter to design's natural quest for integration, complexity, and multiple need satisfaction? Let's see.

For sake of simplicity, we are going to assume that the main operational construct of economics is the "market", i.e., an arena of exchange where any number of social subjects attempt to maximise the difference between outlay and return, either in the acquisition or the sale of specific goods.

Any long-stable market price for a certain good can be thought of as indicative of a stalemate, a tug of war with no motion between what the producers/sellers would prefer to receive, i.e. more money, and what the consumers/buyers would prefer to pay, i.e. less money. This sort of stability, which economists call equilibrium, is rare in non-commodity goods. Commodities are goods that are standard in quality no matter who makes them, like sugar, salt, gasoline and lumber. As soon as we introduce novelty, technological progress, artistic judgment, fashion, perceived or real shortages, and so on, the price-quality stalemate is undone. Goods start sliding around in the correlation space of price and quality, pulled hither and thither. Opinions fly; justifications are offered. There's introductory pricing and predatory pricing, reputation manufacture and reputation exploitation. Features are introduced and dropped. Competition abounds. In these circumstances, can there be any real progress? It would seem that you, producer/seller, pull this way and I, consumer/buyer, pull that; we, collectively, come to an agreement as to viable price, and that's it (FIGURE 1).

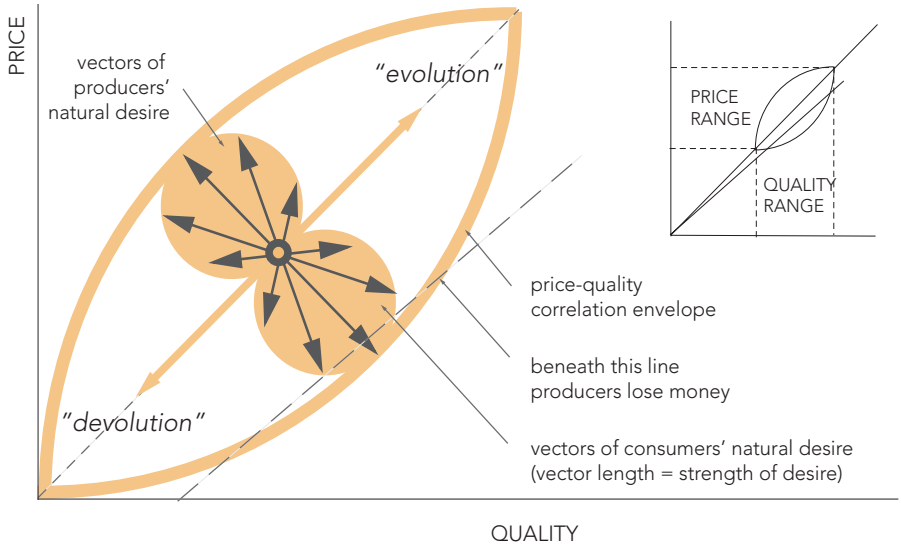

FIGURE 1: The producer-seller's and the buyer-consumer's desires in the space of product quality and price

Actually, progress can be made in an absolute sense. I would claim that both *price* and *quality* represent a deeper life-critical variable, namely complexity-and-organisation, the general increase of which has characterized the evolution of all forms of life, biological and cultural, for millions of years.

Even now goods evolve and, when they do, they get better. Markets evolve and, when they do, the costs of things traded in them drifts upward, too, as more bits, information, complexity, more internal markets and longer supply chains, form. When a whole class of products improves, it becomes more complex-and-organised. Overall, when this happens to many classes of products, what we see is *more* people able to pay *more money* for *better quality* goods and services. How are they able to do that? It is because they are richer. Why are they richer? Because the goods and services *they* produce fetch higher prices too. Why? All other things being equal, it is because they're better. And so on, round after round, as more intelligence is applied to satisfying more people's needs more specifically and more completely. This is not inflation, which is what happens when governments put more money into circulation than is warranted by production-, employment-, and quality-levels. This is economic *evolution*, and it's been happening for thousands of years.

I paint a rosy picture: goods improve and people's lives improve over the exceedingly long term. In the short term, however, other dances are danced in the correlation space of price and quality. Say a new business comes on to the market; a new restaurant opens or a new car is introduced. What do producers/sellers offer? Relatively high quality for an obviously low price: the consumer's dream. But, as time goes by, the producer/seller slowly causes the product to drift toward a position he or she is happier with, which is to say, high price and low quality. This is doable in part because, with success, per-unit average production costs can come down. Economies of scale is the name economists give this phenomenon, and it allows producers to maintain or lower their prices while maintaining or increasing their profits. In this scenario, quality need not suffer, although it often does, especially with relatively low-tech goods. But people are much better at noticing price differences than they are at detecting quality differences. The latter requires connoisseurship, vigilance, and immunity from the reputation of the producer. By exploiting their good reputation, or by creating one artificially through advertising, producers can lower production costs by cutting corners, hollowing things out, skimping on services and warranties, using cheaper materials that look

the same, and so forth. Such goods, in the minds of their consumers, come to occupy what might be called the 'phantom position'. Eventually that position may evaporate, as the truth becomes known and as competing products start their cycle with the same or better product at a lower price. But in the meantime, many fallacies can be generated, much money can be made, and many genuine opportunities can be lost.

Why should architects worry about this process? Because, I argue, as producers in competition with one another, and as people naturally anxious to succeed economically, to please people, to be part of the game and to be 'creative', architects often find themselves following this pattern, either by design or by default. They become indirect facilitators of Gresham's Law.

Gresham's Law

Sir Thomas Gresham, 1519-1579, was a successful businessman and financial advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, whom he served as Royal Exchanger and as the ambassador to the Netherlands (FIGURE 2). What he noticed was that when you introduce coinage into circulation that has a lower metallic value than the coinage currently in circulation but that has the same face value—if you mint silver dollar coins while gold dollar coins are also circulation, and gold per ounce is more valuable than silver per ounce—people stop using the gold coins as money and melt them down instead to get more silver ones. Or they simply hoard the gold coins as their price in silver dollars goes higher. Sooner or later, by this process, brass dollars replace silver ones, paper money replaces brass money, digital money replaces paper money, and so forth. That's because money, to be money, need have no quality beyond inducing other people to trust that yet other people will give them goods in proportion to the money's stated face value. Money *need have nothing but this face, a mere number, backed up by a system of location and overall quantity control.*

Although Gresham's Law—'bad money drives out good money'—was discovered earlier and was stated more clearly later, his was the wording by which we know the law today.

Now, Gresham's Law is avowedly only about the peculiar good called 'money'. But occasionally it is generalised, extended. These extensions take the form of large and usually vague claims that 'bad x drives out good x', where x is anything that the proclaimer holds in high regard and that is disappearing or being debased. It might be good kosher hot dogs, maths education, honesty-

FIGURE 2: Portrait of Sir Thomas Gresham, 1544. (Courtesy of the Mercers' Company Archives and Art Collection)

in-politics, or quality-built homes. Such popular extensions are rarely argued with any precision or pursued very far, making it easy for professional economists to dismiss them as trivial.

But I want to be kinder to the extenders of Gresham's Law. And also stricter. For, what I wish to argue, ultimately, is that Gresham's Law names a process inscribed into the very texture of commerce, lodged deep within the very nature of economic exchange of all goods, operative before the introduction of money and often, today, without it. Gresham's Law, to my mind, is no mere curiosity applying to coinage. Its reach, indeed, extends into architecture and its evolution, under market conditions, into a form of tradable financial asset. So let us go back to Gresham's Law in its classic form in more detail.

If A is a coin containing 50 per cent silver and B is a coin containing 10 per cent silver and both have the same face value, the owners of A-coinage will profit from turning it into B-coinage. Historically, as I have indicated, this turning into meant taking bags of A-coinage to the official government mint where, for a small fee, A-coins were taken in and more, new, debased B-coins were given back in return. In this way, with thousands of people taking advantage of the process, the good money rapidly disappeared from the marketplace and the bad money became the one that circulated, eventually driving out the good. Over the long term, repeated debasements had the effect of making the buying power of coinage depend less and less on its metallic content and more and more on the state's warrant that the coinage was money of the worth stamped on its face.

Soon, though, going to a government mint was not necessary to carry out the conversion. The warrant of a state-authorised *bank* was sufficient. By the 18th century, private banks in Europe and the US could and did issue unique currencies of their own, usually paper notes of redemption—banknotes—backed by gold and precious metal holdings.

Now, the exchangeability of one form of currency for another at a mint, or at some barter market for their base materials, is not a necessary condition for Gresham's Law to operate. It suffices that: 1) the cost of production and use of one currency be lower than the other, 2) sellers be indifferent as to which is tendered in payment for goods, and 3) the issuing authority be indifferent as to which is tendered in repayment of debts and in the payment of taxes. Barter market or no, re-minting or no, finally, only the cheapest-to-produce-and-use

money circulates. That is, only bad money is widely used until yet worse money drives it out, currency such as paper bank-notes, which have very little material or embodied-labour value, and finally, today, computer records, which have even less.

The smoothness of this succession from commodities to coin to paper to computer bits depends on a number of factors, among them these two important ones: first, that the state's authority to control the total supply of money, and to declare and warrant its face value, remain intact; and, second, that sellers in the marketplace cannot post two prices for the same good, one price for payments in good money, one price for payments in bad money, the former being the lower of the two. We need to go one stage deeper. For Gresham's Law in turn depends on it.

The logic of efficacy

Let's now take any physical object: a chair, a shoe, a building or a tree. As a simple consequence of its physical existence it has a huge number of qualities or properties—for example, temperature, colour, form, rigidity, texture, chemical composition. Indeed, it is likely to have all of these properties spatially distributed and temporally varying at many scales—micro to macro, in wholes and in parts, in fleeting and in permanent states. If the object is an artefact, then it also has a history of design, manufacture, use, and ownership. The object's ancillary effects on its surroundings are apt to be many and varied too, from adding load to the ground or floor it sits upon, to deflecting wind, blocking views, emitting odours, etc., effects not all of which are intended. My point is that to know or describe any ordinary physical object completely would be a lifetime's work, if not actually impossible. In our dealings with things, therefore, we must perforce pay attention to a small fraction of the enormous set of their qualities or properties.

Now, for a given good, let us identify the largest subset of distinct characteristics we could pay attention to if we had the education, motivation, sensitivity, and opportunity to do so, and label that set $Z = \{z\}$. Each member of Z, $z \in Z$, is an element of description, an elementary fact about the good, thought of not as the description itself, but, in realist fashion, as a distinct feature of the object that z describes. Let the total number of characteristics in the set be denoted N_z. We can call N_z the 'size of Z' (FIGURE 3).

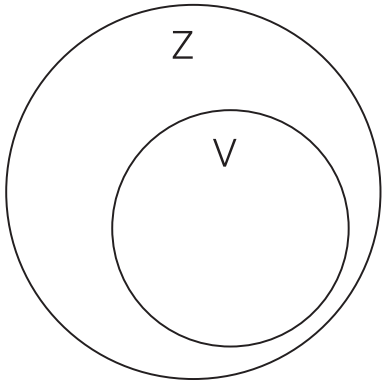

FIGURE 3: The set of a good's characteristics, Z and the subset of those, V, that are valued.

The size and actual composition of Z is changeable, to be sure, depending on the sensitivity of the best observer, the state of science at the time, and so on, but it is nearly always larger than the set V = {v}, which is the subset of all characteristics we commonly value it for, economically or otherwise. That is, $V \subseteq Z$. It follows that $N_v \leq N_z$ The set difference between Z and V, Z - V, is $(N_z - N_v)$ in size. That is, $(N_z - N_v)$ represents the number of all the good's characteristics that are considered superfluous, expendable, irrelevant, that serve merely as a vehicle, such as a plate for food, an orange peel, a glass for water, or that are hidden or not appreciable and thus, we think, not responsible for its ability to satisfy our needs, but that do cost something to produce or transport.

If I were in the business of producing and selling a certain good within a given technological regime, its unit cost to me would be proportional to N_z. But, let's say I learn from market research that my customers are buying my product for reasons that derive from V, which is a subset of Z. This is fine if it costs me nothing to provide Z - V. But if I find that I am spending time, money, or effort producing (or passing along) the $N_z - N_v$ characteristics of the good that my customers and/or potential buyers cannot and/or do not appreciate, what should I do? As Figure 4 illustrates diagrammatically, I have two alternative strategies:

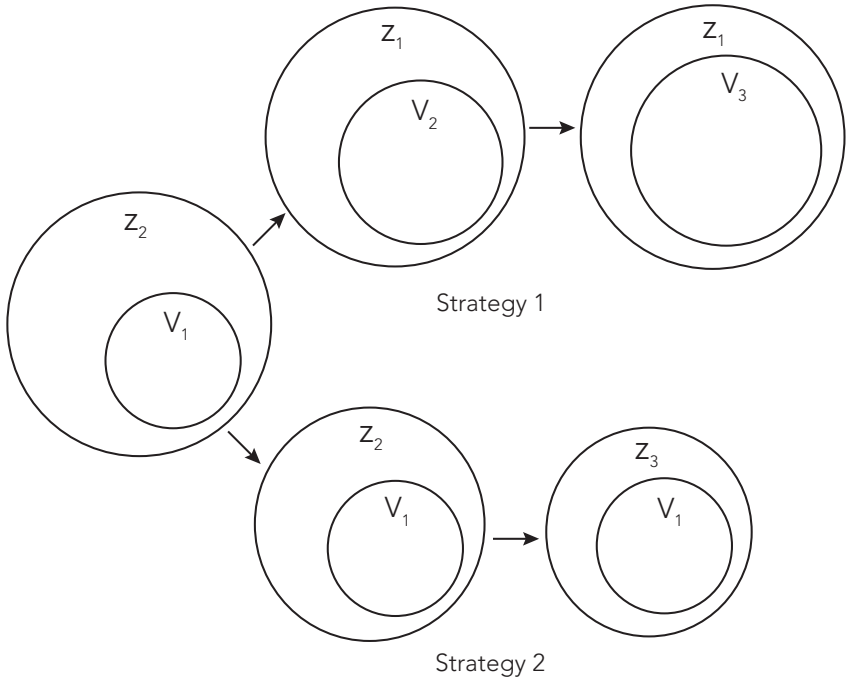

FIGURE 4: Two strategies for decreasing the difference between a product's valued (V) and non-valued (Z–V) characteristics.

Strategy 1: I can educate customers and potential buyers to appreciate these extraneous characteristics so that they come to value them and thus see them as not extraneous at all; or

Strategy 2: I can change the materials used, design, or production techniques of the good so that all not-valued characteristics are as far as possible eliminated, that is, so that $Z - V \rightarrow \emptyset$ and, concomitantly, $N_z - N_v \rightarrow 0$.

With strategy 1, I can probably raise my selling prices and thus my profit margin. With Strategy 2, I can hold or lower my selling prices and still be profitable, this while holding on to or even gaining market share. Both strategies are in principle workable. But are they equivalent in risk or result?

No. For the first is an uphill battle. Educating, advertising, poetising, pointing-out, sensitising, persuading—all are efforts at changing minds and opening eyes that are labour intensive, expensive in themselves, and prone to failure. Besides, to the extent that such efforts succeed, the strategy as a whole may yet fail if a greater number, or even just as many, potential buyers are turned off as are turned on by the new level of connoisseurship being encouraged.

The money that the producer saves in not having to redesign and retool in order to rationalise the product, he must spend in marketing it.

Usually, the easier course for the producer/seller to follow is Strategy 2, namely, to let price do the talking, that is, to let price channel potential buyers towards certain goods, his or her goods, by minimising the expenditure required to obtain the same thing even though, in fact, it is not the same thing at all. This strategy is also likely to increase the effective demand for the product, and hence the potential revenue from its sale, because it aims at the greater bulk of buyers whose incomes, as a rule, are the lower.

And so, in general, under downward price pressure, the ostensibly superfluous qualities of a given kind of product are stripped away until only those that are selling points remain. Strategy 2 dominates. Like coinage under Gresham's Law, products tend to become: 1) no more than what descriptions of them can legitimately say they are and/or have people agree, 2) no more than what can be immediately appreciated about them at the point of sale, and/or 3) no better than they have to be to deliver the desired utility, for whatever period of time is conventionally acceptable. Form follows function until it fits like a rubber glove.

Gresham's Law is not just about bad money driving out good money. It is also about the logic of efficacy: understanding that not every property or quality of a thing we make is equally valued by the person receiving it, and that it is the clever producer, or his/her agent, who is able to capitalise on this fact by redesigning the good so that only the attributes of the good which people notice and want are in fact manufactured. One can increase people's appreciation of the object, as it is, in full (Strategy 1), or one can close down on the object until it is exactly what people want, and only what they want, jettisoning all that, to them, would appear superfluous (Strategy 2). Gresham's Law will always take you down the second and lower road.

The eventual results of Strategy 2 are easy to envisage.

If drinkers cannot tell the difference between 12-year old whiskey and seven-year old whiskey, then seven-year old whiskey, or younger, will sooner or later be found in bottles ambiguously marked No. 12.

If organically grown fruit and vegetables cannot be told apart from those grown with pesticides, then sooner or later government regulation and testing will be required to certify the difference, while advertising campaigns will become necessary to articulate the invisible benefits.

If leather seats are a mark of quality in expensive cars and we cannot easily tell the difference between leather and leather-patterned vinyl, then cars with leather seating areas—that is, cars that economically mix real and simulated leather here and there in order to capitalise on our inability to tell the difference, will come to be the norm.

If religion A has a larger number of rituals, prescriptions, and proscriptions than religion B, then all persuaded that religion B offers the same inspiration, comfort, and access to God will become adherents of religion B, and simplicity-loving gods, perhaps with the help of some guitars, will drive out complexity-loving ones.

If two educational institutions offer the same quality of education but one calls itself an institute and the other calls itself a university, the one calling itself a university will attract more students and can demand higher fees. Hence the inflation of higher education institutional names, as well as the proliferation of higher and higher degrees providing the least thorough education possible that can still muster accreditation.

Most of us, of course, are dispositionally set to wishing that more could be had for less: more fun with less effort; greater value for less money; more accomplishment in less time. The problem is that, often, we turn a blind eye to the cheapening we have accepted, or, when it is pointed out, argue, largely on faith, that we have traded difficulties that are not worthwhile for opportunities, always vaguely defined, that are. As a culture, collectively, the result is this: that any impoverishment of the set of attributes, qualities, and characteristics widely understood to be of value in any good sooner or later leads to a corresponding impoverishment of what is produced in the name of that good, *as* that good. This is Gresham's Law at its most universal. And architecture, in thrall to functionalism, has been chief amongst its 20th century casualties.

Building (in) the world of Gresham

Let's pretend, for example, that Z_1 represents a house of a certain size and combination of amenities that is well designed, well detailed, and well built with good materials through and through. Let Z_2 and Z_3 represent coarser houses, with fewer niceties and cheaper materials—internal bathrooms, for example, rather than windowed ones, veneers instead of wood, fake marble instead of real, hollow-core instead of solid doors, and so forth—and yet of the same square footage and number of rooms and list of amenities, V_1. If all that matters, or is made to matter, to house buyers is total size, number of rooms, and list of amenities, i.e., V_1, then the coarser house, which costs less to build and can be sold a little cheaper or a little bigger, will sell before the finer one will, and in general, for a given neighbourhood, houses of the cheaper type will come to outnumber houses of the richer type to which they are 'for all intents and purposes'—a telling phrase!—indistinguishable. The set of features Z_1—V_1, if noticed at all, will be characterised by the sellers of the cheaper houses as just so many bells and whistles and certainly not worth the money.

More so will this be the case if most owners buy solely with a view to resale. If it is determined once or twice, early on, that pretentious facades constitute that part of V_1 that helps resale, then pretentious facades will drive out modest ones, this in a self-perpetuating chain that will drive the good but less conspicuous facades, the simple permeable fences and the consistent streetscape out of our urban experienced fabric. Similarly, if maximising resellability is the most significant purpose in making/building/buying a home, then houses and the land they sit upon will evolve towards a market-proven average or type which really suits no-one at all: a sort of coin, a form of money, a financial instrument.

To be sure, many grand old buildings are saved by preservationists, even restored, and put safely away from the marketplace. This is Gresham's hoarding of the gold coin and putting the cheaper coin—the paper-thin boxes we live in for a while and then trade as real estate—into circulation. But because of its very and comparatively expensive nature, this form of saving is limited. In the end, the ghost of Gresham will see many of us sleep in internal office/bedrooms, use street-unbuffered and pulled-curtains rooms at ground level, enjoy functional areas defined by changes in carpet surface, control our internal environment through balcony-applied cooling units rather than spatial articulation and filtering, cook on granite benches and stainless steel

appliances rather than in kitchens, get generic, undefined views out of our space rather than proper lighting in, swim in one-lane lap pools, and so forth.

If people can't see the difference between a good building and a bad building, a good space and a bad space, they are slowly but surely going to get worse buildings and spaces. If they can't tell the difference between expensive and cheap, they're going to get cheap, especially when cheap is branded by a reputed designer willing to franchise his or her name. Because, under most circumstances, people will not have the technical knowledge or the cultural proclivity to understand what buildings are capable of doing to enhance their lives in the myriad subtle ways they can; they will see only the loudest forms and make their architectural decisions—from what to build to what to buy or rent—on the most accessible information: the Sunday papers, architecture as real estate.

A study of motivations

If it is true, as I have asserted it is for many important categories of goods, that reducing the number of attributes understood to be of value in that category will eventually lead to a corresponding reduction of what is produced as that good, then what in our economic system encourages this reduction to take hold in the first place? And when it does not take hold, as it has not for many products—products that, on the contrary, have grown in marvellousness and complexity over time and indeed, may not have existed at all before, like cars and computers and movies—why? Does Gresham's Law, like some disease, strike only the already weak? Is it an agent of natural selection that we really ought to have the wisdom to welcome? Let us not look for 'bad' people.

One answer is obvious: the extension of Gresham's Law is fuelled, as it were, by the normal—indeed laudable—desire of producers, sellers, and resellers to cut production or acquisition costs relative to fetchable prices, so as to open up the gap that is the *profit they deserve for their ingenuity and risk-taking*. This is fair enough. But it is not far enough.

Where does this impulse to cut costs and lower prices rather than raise quality and raise prices relative to costs come from? After all, profit is a *difference* between two numbers, not an absolute number. Cannot handsome profits be made from producing high-quality, high-cost items? The demand certainly is there: everyone wants more sophisticated goods and tools, more beautiful environments, better educations, richer life experiences, etc. What prevents

this higher quality world from evolving more quickly and evenly, or, in some places, at all? I suggest that it is the overriding, all but universal, drive to save money per se. This drive, felt by all, issues primarily from two reasons.

The first reason is unequal income distribution. This causes the size of the potential market for a given class of goods to become larger as its prices fall. Thus, under conditions of between-seller competition, it is usually in the interests of every producer-seller to push his/her prices down just fast enough to match or undercut most of his/her competitors, so as to gain sufficient market share, and sufficient revenue thereby, to offset in total profit what might be sacrificed in average, per-unit profit. And if, through the adoption of new production and/or distribution technologies, a firm's marginal costs can be made to fall faster than its asking prices need to fall in order to maintain or increase market share then that firm's total profits are doubly assured.

The second reason, and more basically, for the first reason depends ultimately on this one, is the fact that most people, whether they are well-off or not, would rather spend less time and money on/for V than more, and will thus give their business to the seller who provides V at the lowest price and/or with the least fuss. What could be more obvious, more normal? But keep reading.

For, moreover, when we adopt the rule 'buy the lowest price X' and X is also rather generically specified, for example a hotel room, a pair of brown shoes, a college degree, an investment unit, our lives are also considerably *simplified*. The rule 'buy the lowest price X' delivers to us an advantage beyond affordability and money savings. Since the rule demands no reflection or exertion, it delivers to us also *more freedom* as time. After all, why be delayed with investigating, weighing, and wondering about the value of this thing over that thing when this very activity cuts into the pleasurable time one might spend choosing among other things more lightly, with less agony? More often than not, of course, the rule 'buy the lowest price X' simply lets us be intellectually lazy. Rather than having to discriminate between rooms, or shoes, or educations on the basis of their quality, origins, or long-term consequences—a complex pursuit with often inconclusive results—'buy the lowest price X' lets us cut to the chase.

Under the combined effect of Gresham's Law, the economic logic of efficacy, and a society-wide fixation on maximising opportunities, we can begin to see how easily price and convenience, combined with buyers' general lack of

adequate information and a predisposition to being convinced of the merit of a good and the soundness of their judgment, can become the dominant bases for market competition amongst sellers for buyers.

Alas, cheapness and convenience, are often pursued and achieved at the expense of producing, and then having, goods of significant material quality, lastingness, complexity, or worthwhile difficulty-in-the-making, which is to say, goods that take time to appreciate or master on the one hand, and that take time and skill to produce on the other.

Now, critics of my critique of Gresham's Law and of the logic of efficacy upon which it is based will always make this 'democratic' argument: the negative value of 'cheapening' lies only in the eye of the *elitist* beholder. Surely the fact that vastly more people can enjoy the mass-produced simulacrum of a good than the original, hand-made one is something to be celebrated. Nylon sheer stockings are simulacra of the earlier silk stockings, affordable only by the rich, for the masses. Would you have us ban nylon stockings? And rare wood veneers because only solid wood is the real thing?

Let me cut this critique short. The object of economic growth and development is to improve, enrich, and lengthen the lives o*f all* people, especially those of modest means. To the extent that technology helps us do this, I support it wholeheartedly. I say yes to nylon stockings! I only ask for watchfulness. For people are easily short changed, easily persuaded to get less than they need, or deserve, or, in a better world, could well afford, especially if they can be made to feel grateful to receive anything at all.

Certainly, with the unfolding of Gresham's law, the fundamental inhabitation tenets of a civilised society are becoming more and more expensive, and increasingly out of reach. Without realising it, we have reduced our expectations, and by reducing our expectations we make previously standard building offerings uncompetitive in the marketplace and therefore obtainable only at a premium. Consider, for example, that the social housing flats built throughout the Western world in the first half of the 20th century had more basic environmental amenities than relatively expensive private residential apartments today. The standards imposed by local authorities to instigate slum clearance then, were higher, spatially, than those employed in the 21st century to do the same. In America, as in large swaths of Australia, car ownership is all but required to live a modest life. And one need only look at the ex-urban

wasteland that characterises most cities today, and how their historic pre-1940 downtowns constitute the only precincts worth visiting, or living in, in style.

This is to say that individual rational market decisions can have collective outcomes that few, including those who make such decisions, are happy about. People who choose shrunken, simplified dwellings, or support institutional structures built upon car-park technology, do not want to kill the building trades. People who choose large houses in the burbs do not want to choke the roads. People who shop at Wal-Mart do not want to kill off their old main streets. They just want to save dollars, have a wider choice of goods, and so forth. Who can blame them? People want cheap energy and low taxes. Who doesn't? But in pursuit of what we want we get lots of hidden costs: unnecessary infrastructure, dead rivers, cracked sidewalks, dumb kids, and bad buildings.

When it comes to architecture, as I have noted, we are confronted with this dynamic writ large. Move among ordinary people and you will find that still, after decades of publicity and Pritzker Prizes—the what prize?—people don't know what architecture is or what architecture does. Besides, in the construction marketplace, architects have been outflanked and outmanoeuvred by the purveyors of stronger medicines with better stories.

Architects, it must be said, have not fought back effectively, but instead continue to sacrifice themselves on an altar of their own making, either in recognition of markets' leverage or in loyalty to 'creativity'—the religion that still, albeit with increasing difficulty and infighting, organises their schools. Architects can live entirely inside the 'world of architecture', which is a state of mind, without ever leaving it. One can drive through the overturned garbage can that is a large part of the built environment in the US, tsk-tsking about the averageness of other architects, about the stupidity of planners, and the rapacity of developers, without ever thinking of oneself, an architect, as partly responsible for the situation.

My accusation of co-responsibility is based on many architects' relinquishment of their role—indeed duty—in upholding intellectual standards and modes of discourses about design that ordinary people can understand, and that produce buildings that people want to live and work in for reasons other than the fact that they are new. The world presaged by Gresham is not a future we should have to live with, or get used to.

Architects have to fight back, and the only way to do so, as far as I can tell, is to start talking about the complexity of life and its richness in and around and because of buildings. There's more to that than preferring Baroque to Modern, or hand-drawing to FormZ. To revive architecture's value, we, as architects, need to identify publicly and quite specifically which irreducible human needs architecture serves and how it does so. The task is to explain the goodness of good architecture to ordinary people in such a way that they will be willing to pay for its finer points and then press collectively for its delivery. This requires architects to be knowledgeable and clear in communicating architecture's many subtle qualities. It requires that architects never use or allow reductive, cavalier language to describe what they do.

People want reasons to value what they value. If we don't supply them, who will?

Note: This article is based on a chapter in a larger, yet unpublished work by Michael Benedikt, *A General Theory of Value*, the synopsis of which is available online at http://www.utexas.edu/architecture/centre/benedikt/index.html and has been edited with the author's permission.