

“Brands exist to reassure, to attain security”

OAKLEY

CK
Calvin Klein

EMPORIO ARMANI
underwear

BO
HUGO

Anna Klingmann
Author of Brandscapes -
Architecture in the
Experience Economy



“Creating Space for Imagination and Personal Discovery”

What comes after the experience economy? The transformation economy. It is about the choreography of participatory experiences, which are not just entertaining, but also enriching. It is about the creation of meaningful content, which has the power to change people and places. An interview with Anna Klingmann.

How did you come up with the idea that architecture can be more than just form?

In the 1980s, architecture was completely detached from the public sphere and from any social function. It was an era during which architecture viewed itself as an elitist discipline, which had consciously disconnected itself from the user. This was much in contrast to the situation in product design. Moreover, it was also a time when the real estate market had not yet recognized the added value of architecture. The result: The public generally despised architecture because it only addressed other architects and a very small elite. However, this situation has changed drastically over the last 15 years. Today, architecture is marketed as a lifestyle. My book “Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy” talks about this paradigm shift. This change on how we perceive architecture today was partially promoted by the media, which in the 1990s slowly began to feature architecture as a lifestyle product. Just think of “Wallpaper” by Tyler Brul . “Wallpaper” was the first magazine, which decided to publish innovative architecture alongside fashion, and other designer items in order to promote a lifestyle.

Globalization greatly amplified this perception where architecture is now increasingly viewed as a brand. In this respect, the construction of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by Frank Gehry can be seen as the starting point of this whole shift. The contribution, which this building has made to location marketing, was immediately recognized and successfully copied throughout the world: In the new markets, in the Middle and Far East but also in Europe, the United States, and in the former Soviet Union.

In the chapter “Architecture as Experience” you mention that architecture had lost its ability to provoke and stimulate the imagination of non-architects. At the same time, the film industry, TV and brands had succeeded in igniting

consumers’ dreams and desires. What went wrong?

This is about challenging the entire functional and ideological heritage of modernism and moving the focus from architecture as such to the effect that architecture can produce. It is more about how a user perceives architecture and not whether the building has the “right” ideological design. Let us look at the casinos in Las Vegas or at Disneyland, for example. This is architecture, which appears completely wrong from a compositional perspective, yet provides a holistic consumer experience. As a result, the user becomes an actor in a choreographed event. And this is why these developments are so commercially successful. However, the debate at the universities still or yet

“This is partially the result of an accelerating communication industry, which has an exhilarating but also an exhausting effect on people—commonly known as Facebook fatigue. Today there is an increasing longing for cultural content.”

again chooses to focus almost exclusively on parametric design, on the creation of dynamic shapes, which has very little to do with the user or actual content. Architecture in the academic world is largely looked upon from a formal and, hence, ideological perspective. This attitude has not changed. What has changed is the use of forms. All of this adds up to yet another very dogmatic approach with new technologies. These dogmas are not really in touch with the actual needs of the users and the actual experience of architecture.

What exactly is brand architecture or, as you so aptly put it, “buildings as brands”?

Brand architecture creates an added economic and social value. Under classic corporate identity, architecture conveys a company’s profile to the outside world and, at the same time, it also communicates a company’s social values internally with the aim of creating a certain image or a certain work atmosphere. Let us look at the Google headquarters as an example of this. Here, the free spirit of Google is reflected in the architecture; employees have the possibility of designing their own workspace. Leisure and work are mixed through unique elements, sometimes initiated by the employees themselves, such as table tennis tables and slides creating a sort of work and play space for adults. At the same time, a strategic image is created, which is in line with Google’s identity. However, in contrast to this example of a user-oriented architecture, we are mostly faced with a situation of co-branding, which is frequently mistaken for brand architecture. In this instance, a star architect is hired to create a form, which is intended to enhance a company’s identity. However, because it is a pre-made style that is simply imported from the outside-in and not really developed from the inside-out to reflect the unique spirit of the company, such buildings frequently appear sterile and not in tune with the company’s values. An image is created, which conveys high visibility but not character and personality.

What is a good brand experience?

In my opinion, a good brand experience stimulates new ideas and, ideally, conveys a feeling of growth and enrichment. Entertainment and fun are passive experiences; however, true enrichment requires the customers or users to become actively involved. An experience is something that happens inside the person and that differs from the constant stream of information and ready-made emotions, which we get from TV. Particularly on the scale of city marketing, it becomes increasingly vital to generate cultural and social content, which is inspirational and therefore generated from within. Such contents

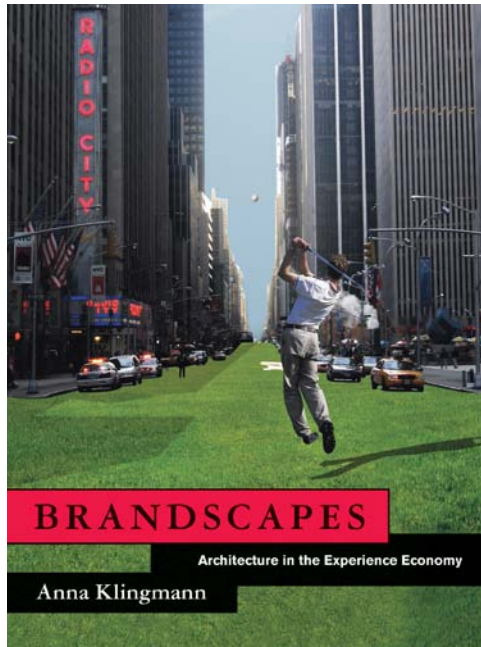
differ from culture to culture, from place to place, which means that the participation of people from a specific region is crucial to create this identity. Only when people identify, can you have a true identity.

What kind of brand architecture—which no longer glorifies only itself but focuses on the client—would you recommend for the banking world whose credibility has suffered?

Interestingly, banks have done a lot. They have tried to expand the classic banking service with congenial sitting areas and shopping corners and designed lounges for young people. This was an attempt to dissolve the existing dogmatic formality. But this in my opinion leaned too much towards creating an entertaining situation, which really has nothing to do with satisfying the customer's needs. In addition, enormous amounts of money were spent on super-cool branding campaigns, such as HSBC's "The World's Local Bank". But this brand promise, as cool as it is, was never translated into reality. The customer service remains as anonymous and standardized as it has always been. So it is the customer experience and the small things that we miss in a large corporation—the personal touch, which makes the customer feel accepted and understood. A move away from the "banking machine" and towards a small-scale retail experience. This is a classic gap, which arises between the brand promise and its fulfillment. The creation of a successful banking experience ought to pursue the aim of building a personal atmosphere in which the customer feels understood, in which he or she is treated as an individual person and in which employees are also permitted to behave as real people who have different personalities. But this is exactly what is prevented by standardized corporate procedures. Companies superficially pretend to understand their customers, calling them by their first name and offering nice conversation corners. But in fact they are clueless about their customers' real needs. This deficit cannot be compensated for with expensive advertisement campaigns or cool interiors.

The newly constructed, former World Trade Center in New York has difficulties in finding tenants. Why is this?

The former World Trade Center now called Freedom Tower is of course marked by the tragedy of September 11th. People in New York still vividly remember that day and are reluctant to move into the new Freedom Tower. Moreover, there is the risk that a disaster like this might happen again at any time.



The book "Brandscapes" by Anna Klingmann is available at bookstores and online at amazon.com.

Potsdamer Platz in Berlin and Times Square in New York are two distinct and well-known examples of city branding, which have been reconstructed over the last decades. You mentioned in your book that these have assimilated the identities of Daimler Chrysler and Sony in Berlin and Disney in New York. What is going wrong when cities decide to assume the identities of brands instead of their own identities?

In principle, both places were planned as Urban Entertainment Centers, primarily with the goal to increase tourism. In fact, we have to admit that both centers work very well commercially. But in both locations you will never find local people because these places are absolutely uninteresting. Both locations are constructed as Entertainment Districts, which were popular in the nineties—consumer landscapes, which you can now find essentially anywhere in the world. A kind of theme park, which has nothing to do with the actual city.

In "Brandscapes" you said that architecture could be used as an instrument of economic and cultural change. What does that mean?

Architecture can be a catalyst that promotes development. The classic example is Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the construction of which was a big risk for the city at the time but in retrospect proved more than worthwhile. It did not only bring visitors to the city but also stimulated further urban development, which upgraded a devastated economy and brought it back to life. Also in Dubai, architecture was used to generate a new economy

and market this city as a unique attraction throughout the world. Aside from these more obvious examples, architecture harbors also great potential to rebrand secondary cities that suffer from negative image problems, cities that are ridden by high unemployment or crime, that are desolate and whose image has deteriorated from positive to negative. Buffalo and Detroit are examples of such cities, which used to have a thriving industry but have since become urban deserts because industry has moved elsewhere.

The famous advertising guru David Ogilvy once said that the key to successful advertising is in promising the customer a benefit: better taste, cleaner clothes...

In how far can this statement be transferred to brand architecture?

Architecture has the potential of creating a better lifestyle, places where people feel good. This is partially to do with form but more importantly involves how you program the space. For example, how you effectively combine working and living, how you create places, which ensure entertainment and cultural stimulation alongside places of retreat and quietness. I always refer to this as "human sustainability".

You state that experiences are becoming mass-produced items today. What do you mean by this?

Everyone and everything is creating an experience today. Experience has become a product. Starbucks, Apple, the tourism industry, they all promise "unique experiences". This principle also applies to theme parks, resorts and restaurants. In other words, experience is no longer what we create for ourselves but what is offered to us as a consumable product. The merchandise you ultimately buy is just a kind of by-product, a souvenir of the experience you just had as a consumer. For example, at a restaurant you no longer pay for the actual food but for the staged experience, for the time you spend there.

What value does the Bauhaus motto "form follows function" have in the experience economy? What does "architecture as a user-oriented experience" mean?

The meaning of function in architecture has drastically changed and will probably keep changing. Over the last 15 to 20 years, the main function of architecture has been to impress investors and rich clients by the use of star architects who promise a unique artifact. It was less about content but about creating a photogenic postcard image, which ensured instant recognition. Architecture was used to

create superlatives, such as the highest tower, the most cutting-edge hotel, or the best name. It was about the creation of glamorous icons that could be promoted to the world. And a lot of money was made from this. But, in retrospective, we see that also high levels of debt were generated in some places, see Spain. The global crash in many ways has forced us to halt and rethink. Maybe we have now reached a point where we can focus on the development of new ideas and concepts again. There is also an increasing longing for cultural content. This is partially the result of an accelerating communication industry, which has an exhilarating but also an exhausting effect on people—commonly known as Facebook fatigue. Maybe we have reached a point where we are ready for more introspection, where we can allow ourselves the freedom to think and innovate, rather than just produce. This is something that has been lost over the last 15 years as a result of all the hype.

You say that modernist architecture is essentially used to strengthen the architect's brand and cite the example of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who acquired the brand name Le Corbusier. How can an architect take the leap to becoming a creator of brand spaces, which cater to the client rather than the architect?

Architecture is frequently architect-centered, and in this sense can be quite narcissistic. But ironically, people also demand this recognition, the architect as a god who leaves his mark on the world. People request this because it generates a certain recognizability or a brand value. If one can manage to enlist the services of Helmut Lang or Zaha Hadid, one becomes part of that global club. As a result, people rarely seem to have the courage to be individualistic, and to create a building that is in line with their own personality rather than with someone else's. Brands exist to reassure, to attain security and this is the catch here. I personally think that this is not sustainable, especially in the marketing of cities because by copying others, I am inevitably bound to lose my own uniqueness.

You mention that marketing experts should focus not so much on the unique selling proposition but on "the unique buying state of their customers". What does that mean?

This reverts to your earlier question regarding banks. Most companies focus way too much on creating a cool image, but they lose track of their individual customers. As we know, most large corporations no longer offer true customer service. The customer is palmed off with empty phrases and not addressed as a real person with his or her own specific problems and needs. Today, consum-

er needs are only acknowledged in the extreme high-end and low-end segments.

How do you assess the brand "Switzerland"?

I love "Swiss Made" as much as the rest of the world. What is interesting about it is that the brand "Switzerland" has something very open about it and yet, at the same time, it also promises exclusivity. In a nutshell, Switzerland embodies an idyllic secluded world but optimally combines this image with a very contemporary attitude, without losing sight of the small-scale fabric or the local identity of the individual cantons. And I truly hope it will remain this way. We need such a place in the world—a retreat.

What will follow the experience economy?

I would say: the transformation economy. In principle, this will be about designing experiences, which are no longer merely about fun and entertainment, but moreover truly transformative and enriching. This in turn entails the generation of relevant content, which has a sustained effect on people and places. Currently, in our office, we focus increasingly on site-specific strategies and building identities that effectively express the culture and characteristics of specific places. For example, by using local materials and local labor or by integrating local retail businesses instead of supra-regional chains, you have the opportunity to create a sense of pride and identity within the community. It is about the creation of new icons that actively involve people from the region, be it in the decision-making process of a project, in the making of a building or in the planning of a new city district. This elevates a place and people identify with it because it reflects their culture and they made an active contribution. It is no longer about exporting a western paradigm to the rest of the world and to make a big splash on the surface. It is more about creating an inner set of values that speak to the values of a particular place. And it is about inviting people to explore and discover their own culture, which, needless to say, differs greatly from place to place. The transformation economy creates places of silence, which enable people to follow their imagination—and to grow.



**Außergewöhnliche
Temporärbauten in
innovativem Design!**



**Full Service für
exklusive Großevents
und attraktive
Messeauftritte!**



RÖDER

Zelt- und Veranstaltungsservice GmbH



www.mobile-locations.eu