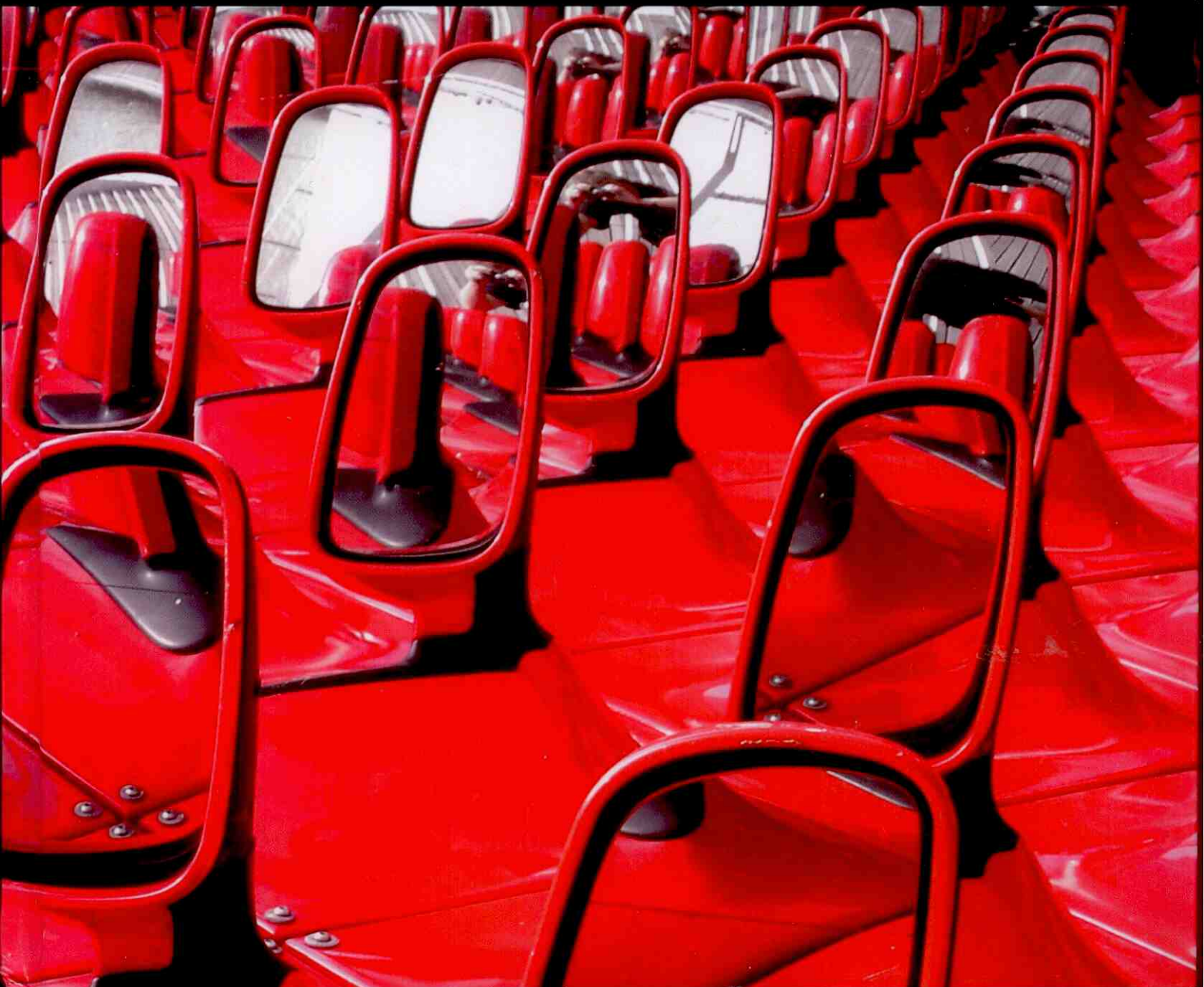


PERFORMATIVE URBAN DESIGN

Hans Kiiib



Performative Urban Design seeks to identify emerging trends in urban design as they are reflected in the city's architecture and spatial design. A "cultural grafting" of the inner city is taking place, and architecture and art are playing a catalytic role in urban development. On the one hand, this development has been rooted in massive investments in "corporate architecture." On the other, cities themselves have invested heavily in new cultural centers and performative urban spaces that can fulfill the growing desire for entertainment and culture.

The anthology *Performative Urban Design* addresses these issues through three perspectives:

- Sense Architecture;
- Place-Making; and
- Urban Catalysts.

The articles in this volume identify relevant theoretical positions within architecture, art and urban strategies while demonstrating relevant concepts and methodological approaches drawn from practical experience.



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CREATIVE BRANDSCAPES HEROES WITH FLAWS

Anna Klingmann

While building booms on a global scale are rare, the world has seen its fair share over the years. But the boom that we are currently experiencing is unique, not merely because of its extraordinary longevity, but also because of its uniquely twenty-first century perspective on architecture's purpose as a brand. Increasingly, the skylines and urban landscapes throughout the "Global Village" have become "staged brandscapes," composed of towering symbols of corporate identity, where everything seems to be arranged for effect. This, of course, was not always the case. I started my research into branding at a time when architects were commonly perceived as a nuisance to developers, an obstacle to profit-making; during the 1980s and 1990s, architects had virtually no input into the design of private developments, except, of course, the design of the ubiquitous mirrored lobby. It was a time when good architecture was equated with luxury that only a privileged few could afford – a time when the general public eyed contemporary architecture with suspicion and apprehension. So I asked myself: Why do people buy the latest, coolest VCR while resisting that very same innovation in architecture? What caused that tremendous rift between architects and the rest of us? It became soon apparent that the enormous gulf between architects and consumers was, in fact, was in fact instigated by the modernists and their post war legacy, and then merrily continued by elitist architects who were on the whole pretty much aloof to socio-economic needs in their incessant search of a grand vision.. This divide between creative vision and consumers' desires never existed in product design, which not only acknowledges people's expectations and preferences, but, in fact, strives to surpass them. This perception of architecture as an elitist prerogative has radically changed in the last two decades or so. Now, architecture is increasingly perceived as a commodity, as part of a lifestyle – in fact, it has become a brand, which I believe offers enormous, not-yet-exploited opportunities for architects.

Brandism

What exactly is Brandism? Brandism is a trend, where architecture and real estate are increasingly linked to the creation of a distinct identity that enhances the perceived value of an urban district, a residential development, or in some cases, an entire city. This perception of architecture as a commodity is largely keyed to the realities of global capitalism, where cities or even nations are trying to position themselves favorably in the worldwide marketplace in order to attract capital. Branding has been a trend for decades, particularly in the fashion industry, but also for consumer goods in general. We know that the influence of a brand goes far beyond the actual product: the brand becomes a symbol for a particular lifestyle, an attitude, and an identity. The brand is a symbol that conveys an aura of meaning, elevating the status of the consumer as it is recognized by others. In many ways, brands signify perhaps most importantly, a sense of belonging. Whereas the idea of the machine permeated cultural and commercial production during



Apple Store
Fifth Avenue, Interior
Photo: Anna Klingmann

the Industrial Age (often referred to as the Machine Age) and served as a metaphor for efficiency and standardization, the brand has become a symbol for contemporary consumer values associated with the Information Age: customization, differentiation, and communication.

In the twenty-first century, brand values change ever more rapidly, as we are experiencing a profound transition from highly standardized brands that conveyed the egalitarian values of the baby boomers

to the mass-customized brands of a more brand-educated Generation X that embraces a more cynical world view. And from Gen X we progress to Gen Y, those who grew up entirely brand savvy and therefore embrace much subtler local brands. To summarize the effects of branding, brands no longer focus on the product but on the act of building associations with particular lifestyles, contexts, and consumers. Brands give products, services, places, and events an added symbolic value, which elevates them above themselves and makes them more than they are in a material or functional sense. Brands synthesize images, identities, and lifestyles into coherent entities, while simultaneously codifying cultural values. Brands can act as catalysts to raise the value and/or status of a particular place, a person, or an event.

The very same progression from materiality to ephemerality - from object to subject - can be witnessed in architecture. Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is no longer first and foremost assessed by its primary function (museum), no longer solely by its capacity to act as a sign for the city (Bilbao), but by its ability to instigate change (economic growth and urban renewal). The building compounds use value, sign exchange value, and transformational value, converting the building into a piece of brand equity. Thus, whereas modern architecture was evaluated by its ability to increase production efficiency and early postmodern architecture by its potential to convey symbolic value, current architecture must be assessed by its economic potential to raise the perceived value of its beneficiary, be it a single client, a corporation, or a city.

Put differently, architecture in an experience economy has evolved from an emphasis on "what it has" (the object), and "what it does" (function and program), to "what you feel" and to "who you are" (experience and identity), which means that the attention is removed from the object and placed on the object's effect on the subject. As we have moved from a one-size-fits-all economy to a postfordist mass-customization

society, the attention of architecture has shifted from a paradigm characterized by the relationship of form, function, and program to a paradigm of experience and identification.

Branding and architecture

It is evident that particularly in the past two decades, branding and architecture have developed a symbiotic relationship. For example, Prada and other leading brands progressively employ architecture as a central part of their larger branding strategy. At first, brand architecture transformed the retail world with flagship stores such as NikeTown – designed not as much to sell shoes, but as places where customers can experience and immerse themselves in the Nike brand. Similarly, the Apple store created an entire Apple community space along with an aesthetic that mirrors its products. But it is not only the aesthetic but the realization of the program into a unique event space that turns the Apple Store from a conventional retail space into a

comprehensive brand experience. Examples are the Genius Bar, which entails a complete reinvention of customer service, as well as the theater, where people can attend free seminars. These functions turn what used to be a simple store into a major third space, a public hub where people can gather, socialize, and check their email for free. In this sense, the holistic choreography of a brand experience rests on three factors: the hardware, which in essence is the architecture or the stage; the software, which entails the unique programming of the space; and the humanware, which focuses on service and human interaction. After all, if the service and human interaction are not perfectly tailored to the brand experience, the aesthetic experience and the architecture become irrelevant.

As brands today increasingly build emotional connections through values and experiences, there is also a greater interest in having architecture create interactive settings where consumers can experience a

Prada Epicenter New York
Rem Koolhaas 2001
Photo: Anna Klingmann





The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
Frank Gehry, 1996
Photo: The Guggenheim Museum

brand with all their senses. From gallery-like shopping spaces with one-time exhibitions to mobile units, we see an increase in three-dimensional pop-up manifestations. These have a tendency to appear unannounced in an unexpected urban setting, quickly draw in crowds, and then disappear or morph into something else. The buzz they generate beats any public relations campaign and shakes up traditional methods of reaching customers. This idea of conveying brand values in interactive settings has heavily infiltrated the automobile industry on a broader scale. For example, at BMW World in Munich, a brand destination, customers can pick up their cars in a dynamic experiential setting. The Mercedes Museum in Stuttgart is another example where visitors can immerse themselves in the heritage of Mercedes in this new tourist destination.

Brandism - Phase I

But architecture and urban planning now also borrow greatly from branding. For the past twenty years,

architecture has played an enormous role in the branding of cities, primarily with cultural institutions that elevate the image of a city in the global market. This was the case first with Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao in 1996 - a building, which put a formerly economically depressed town in Spain on the map and turned it into a major tourist destination. Other cities soon followed suit and have in recent years successfully used architecture as part of a broader city branding strategy. From the perspective of our current media and marketing-driven environment, architecture is now in a pivotal position. If we count all the buildings that are currently under construction in the Far East, the Middle East, the United States, and elsewhere as part of an attempt to redefine urban, regional, and in some cases also national identities, you will notice how integral architecture is to branding and vice versa. Thinking about architecture as part of our economic environment leads us also to think about opinion shaping, power, identity, and experiencing the world.

When seen in a socio-economic context, architecture is now no longer part of marketing our environment, it has become the essence of it.

Brandism - Phase II

Following this first phase of Brandism where architecture was strategically used to achieve a distinct identity for a city, we have entered the second phase of Brandism in which architecture is used increasingly to achieve a unique image for commercial developments around the world. Celebrity architects who designed cultural institutions are now hired in increasing numbers to design corporate, hotel, and residential developments, particularly in the emerging markets of the Far East, Middle East, and Europe.

Branding has also deeply infiltrated the real estate market in New York: real estate developers now collaborate with branders and star architects to create a unique identity for their buildings. The trend in New York began with Richard Meier's towers on the West Side. Almost six years ago, celebrities such as Martha Stewart, Nicole Kidman, and Calvin Klein were among the first to spend \$2,000 per sq. ft., which convinced some developers that architecture with a capital "A" could help them sell real estate by making their projects unique. The most prominent examples of such collaboration include the New York Times building designed by Renzo Piano, which created a new icon for the New York Times Norman Foster's geodesic vertical extension for the Hearst Corporation Building; Cook + Fox's Bank of America tower; Frank Gehry's Swiss mountain range for the IAC Corporation and the Urban Glasshouse, which translated the myth of Philip Johnson's legendary glasshouse in Connecticut into an urban brand. The Blue Building by Bernard Tschumi typifies the trend of private developers increasingly choosing to collaborate with formerly critical practitioners—pointing to a new movement in architecture where the schism of high and low architecture is increasingly disappearing in the light of global market forces.



Hearst Corporation
Foster & Partners, 2006
Photo: Anna Klingmann

Nevertheless, there seems to be a lot of controversy about and even resistance to how the architectural community might deal with the radical shift and resulting constraints of these new global socio-economic conditions. Many architects would not readily identify their work with branding; in fact, they are doing everything possible to resist this term and yet I would argue their work cannot escape the rules of commodification. Ironically, it is precisely because architecture is increasingly perceived as a product that architects get more work from the private sector. So in a way there is a lot of potential for more good architecture to enter the world although we may also face a shorter attention span, which in turn might lead to a superficial reading of architecture - a kind of "Paris Hilton phenomenon" that depends on instant recognition and, at its worst, is not tied to any notion of content. This phenomenon is evident in Frank Gehry's new project for a medical center in Las Vegas where he consciously emulates the thirst for instant

recognition and lack of content by designing waves of steel and glass that can be anchored into any generic developer project. Thus, Gehry makes life very easy for the developer, who can then build an ordinary, cost-effective, hassle-free building while gaining all the merits from the Gehry brand and image.

Urban brands

In the arena of urban development, however, branding is a slightly different matter. As more and more businesses are attuned to the advantages of multiple international locations and accelerated employment mobility, cities need to confront a growing number of competitors in their efforts to attract scarce resources within an ever-expanding range of possibilities. This is just as true for large cities and metropolitan areas as it is for small communities. Therefore, it is vital for places to adopt a market perspective, establish a strategic vision, and communicate their competitive advantages along with a distinctive image in order

to make potential investors aware of their inherent attributes and features. As cities strive to gain the attention of multinational corporations, visitors, and inhabitants, they need to establish a market-oriented planning process to diversify their economic base and develop mechanisms for flexibly adapting to changing conditions. No longer are places merely the settings for business activity. Places must develop and nurture entrepreneurial characteristics to keep up with the changing economy. As every community transforms itself into a seller of goods and services, places become more like corporations, developing products, markets, and customers.¹ Today, places are ranked and evaluated on every conceivable dimension: where to start a business, where to raise a family, where to plan a vacation, hold a convention, or go for entertainment. From quality of life considerations to charm, culture, and ambiance, the criteria in the quest for livable, investive, and visitable places increasingly revolve around a perpetual search for the new and vibrant. Therefore,

Sadiat island, Abu Dhabi
3D rendering:
Klingmann Architects



cities act as brands - as do corporations - in order to attract business, investment capital, and tourists. However, there is one difference: While corporations are driven by the well-known slogan "think globally, act locally," places however are confronted with the need to do exactly the opposite: they must think locally and act globally, using their differences as equity.

Therefore, as opposed to corporate branding, where the architecture creates an experience that is unique to the corporate brand - by and large disregarding local differences - for architecture to create or strengthen an urban brand, it has to express the latent qualities of the city. In other words, architecture must express a city's unique characteristics, surroundings, landscape, and even the way people interact.

In theory, therefore, brand architecture suggests the possibilities of reconciling market and place; of utilizing brand architecture to create a unique place-based identity. However, the more visible brand architecture becomes, the more it takes on the decontextualized, market-oriented look of franchise culture. Evidently, the continued use of star architects produces an architecture that is less risky for investors but also less and less evocative of a sense of place. As superstar architects stamp their own signatures on the urban landscape, they become increasingly more like franchises that create standardized contexts as they move from place to place. To counter the generic nature of corporate towers, many cities incorporate pre-established themes that are based on narratives imported from elsewhere— a strategy that originated in Las Vegas casinos where specific narratives are translated into experiential commercial landscapes. These themes are now applied successfully to shopping malls and urban entertainment districts. In terms of residential communities, a "Boca Raton-style gated community," complete with golf courses and other leisure-time amenities, seems to be favored from Shanghai to the Middle East, giving rise to an abstracted development formula that is exported everywhere.

All these efforts to create a unique identity eventually coalesced into one grand formula, which at this stage has reached a level of "brand urbanism" most visible in Dubai, most notably with Burj Dubai, a mixed-use destination project that incorporates the world's tallest tower, the world's largest shopping mall, a large man-made waterfront, and an Armani-branded hotel. Over the last decade, Dubai realized an entirely new place-making enterprise by launching a very profitable "island urbanism" built upon the idea of maximizing beachfront properties, exemplified in Palm Jumeirah, Palm Deira and The World. Themed districts such as "Sports City," "Arabian Ranches," and "Dubailand" are other interesting examples of real estate branding in an effort to create unique destinations.

Heroes with flaws

What can be learned from previous urban renewal projects is that while the development of a global culture offers socially and economically exciting prospects, it also introduces new dilemmas and challenges.² While Brand Urbanism seems to be a very marketable product at present, the question of authenticity arises, and we need to address the development of new strategies that capitalize on the specific qualities of a certain place. As star architecture has been elevated to an absolutely perfect image that is publicized and replicated everywhere, the question becomes: What's next? We have achieved picture-perfect heroes, picture-perfect developments designed by the best of architects; we have every luxury awaiting us in residential developments, shopping malls, ski resorts, golf courses and amusement parks. And so the pressing question becomes ever more pertinent: how can developments and cities differentiate themselves in order to be unique and interesting in a world where "uniqueness" and perfection have become the benchmarks? What is the next major trend? What will people be looking for in five years? I believe that people will be looking for heroes with flaws who are the antithesis to picture-perfect characters. These flesh-and-blood heroes will have human personalities,

complete with quirks, faults, and foibles. They exude a human aura. They are authentic and transformational. They endure over time. They shine from the inside out.

We see this thirst for authenticity already in the retail industry. Whole Foods, aside from a new shopping experience, offers a distinct message and has become one of hottest stocks of the decade; the company has translated socially conscious, environmental, and nutritional values into a store environment that provides a sense of community to shoppers. As people become saturated with the same offerings, however, we also witness a growing hunger for surprise and provocation, for difference, for content; an example is Comme des Garçons' provocative marketing technique, mirrored in their flagship stores and exemplified by Dover Street market in London. This cooperative of independent designers hosted by Comme des Garçons helps to keep the brand fresh and imbues a highly visible label with inspiration and original content.

These emerging consumer trends signify a shift from convenience, diversion, and experience to enrichment, inspiration, and content - a trend, which I believe will also gradually affect the real estate world. Therefore, I would argue that in an increasingly fierce competition for the biggest, tallest, and most spectacular buildings, the challenge in the future will be to establish a blue ocean -an uncontested market space - which is not possible to create by relying on established formulas.

The blue ocean can only be achieved by breaking intentionally from the benchmark to create a truly unique product that will then make competition itself, to some degree, irrelevant. This inside-out strategy may demand a sense of original invention, of the rough, the incomplete, the aspirational; a perfect copy cannot make this strategy succeed. In brief, we need authenticity. In a world where the staged resort has become the ultimate building typology, this question becomes ever more pertinent: How can we treat the authentic as a new amenity? In an age of over-consumption, over-

information, and widespread commercial noise, the No Brand may soon be the ultimate brand. It is only a matter of time until the maturing generation will seek the same qualities in their future environment that they now seek out in their consumer choices. I believe this change will be less about achieving a standardized kind of prestige - as with baby boomers - and more about striving for sustainable and highly personalized environments that serve both as an extension of the personality of this generation and as an expression of the regional and cultural environment in which they live. In summary, I predict that people in an age of super-convenience will be looking for a new edge: relevant content that endures over time. They will be looking for real experiences versus trademarked experiences. They will be looking for authenticity that enriches local identity and difference rather than generic recipes and guidelines. While, commodified experiences fade over time no matter how memorable they are, authentic environments are driven by a sense of moving people toward the fulfillment of a genuine purpose.

Living brands

As we are faced with an increasingly homogenized brand-world inhabited by exchangeable offerings - golf communities, retail brands, or resorts - we are developing a growing hunger for the "real." Consumers in a world filled with deliberately and sensationally staged experiences - an unreal or fantasy world - increasingly make their purchases based on how real they perceive an offering to be. Yet, too many real estate developers and companies advertise "authentic" experiences when in reality they offer standardized "me-too" experiences that span the globe. This, in turn, drives up the demand for genuine place-based experiences that draw their inspiration from local cultures and offerings. As brands compete increasingly on a global basis in different markets, it becomes ever more important to create living brands that provide not only standardized convenience, diversion, and entertainment but allow for a sense of spontaneous enrichment, inspiration, and content.



Our mission at Klingmann Architects & Brand Consultants is to develop an architectural brand from "the inside-out" and not - as current development practice seems to dictate - from the "outside in." Living brands are not perfected stylistic veneers, but imperfect expressions that grow from character. Brands can afford to be inconsistent as long as they don't abandon their defining attributes. They are like people. I'll venture one step further and say that developments that are based on a fixed image eventually result in cardboard characters.

In order to provide our clients with a competitive edge in today's market, we take great care in linking a company's intrinsic values to the indigenous cultures of a specific place. This not only helps to reenergize the brand on a consistent basis, but also makes possible truly authentic brand environments that connect commerce with culture and community in more meaningful ways. When cities and buildings project a

three-dimensional personality, inconsistencies and all, we know that the brand resonates with authenticity.

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