



CLOSING REPORT

Architecture & Branding – or the Quest for the Garden of Eden Architecture Talks Lucerne – 30 & 31 May 2008

"Architecture & Branding – or the Quest for the Garden of Eden" was the topic of this year's edition of the Architecture Talks Lucerne. Under the stewardship of Frank Joss, a team of internationally renowned speakers discussed the risks and opportunities of architectural branding.

Is there an architecture which generates happiness? This question formed the starting point of the two-day symposium opened by **Frank Joss, Initiator and Director of the Architecture Talks Lucerne**. On his mental journey round the world, Frank Joss stopped in different places to see where the quest for happiness via architecture could lead. **Moscow**, seduced by its oil riches, plans to redesign around 40 percent of the city's architecture by 2020. Yet, notes Frank Joss, Moscow blinds with "imperial radiance, with Babylonian residential towers in pastel shades, vertical palaces of wealth". The attempt to emulate the West yields nothing more than a clever copy of the West which claims to surpass it. While star architects such as Zaha Hadid, Philipp Meuser or Lord Norman Foster speak about Moscow in rapturous tones as one of the most spectacular cities on earth, Frank Joss wonders whether it is not rather indicative of the programmed infarction of rushed change. It is a frenzy which **China** finds just as difficult to resist. Yet the country seems to forget that it can only present an inimitable image of itself if the population and the states it controls are also given a fair opportunity to peacefully take part in the change. Frank Joss is convinced: after the bloody repression of the uprisings in Tibet, the question of the ethics of architecture looms larger than ever. Already, architects such as Wolf Prix of Coop Himmelb(l)au or Daniel Libeskind have decided in favour of a construction boycott because they do not wish to support a State which violates human rights. Yet is it really that easy to draw the line as to where architecture becomes guilty? Frank Joss does not think so, as there are many examples for both viewpoints. While the attitude of Alfred Speer, son of Hitler's master builder and himself an architect, seems questionable when he views himself as a service provider, no matter whether he is building for a dictator, a monarch or a democratic government, the Egyptian pyramids, Rome's Coliseum or Versailles prove that even megalomaniac despots have bequeathed us a valuable cultural heritage. The dilemma remains unsolved.

On the other hand, the small Arab country of **Qatar** is exemplary in its successful combination of radiant self-assurance and sensitive approach to the Western world. No gigantism as in Abu Dhabi or Dubai, no market place of vanities. A good example is the Museum of Islamic Art, designed by Chinese architect I. M. Pei, who also built the Munich Pinakothek and Washington's National Gallery.

The seminar kicked off with a talk by **Anna Klingmann** of **Klingmann Architects & Brand Consultants**, New York, on "**Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy**". Neglected up to the 1990's, "brandism" — or the creation of identity through architecture and brands — has now become a trend, albeit one which the fashion industry pioneered long ago. The now adult members of "Generation Y" have grown up as absolute brand connoisseurs and accordingly, brands today focus "not on products but rather on lifestyles, able to increase the value or the status of a location, a person or an event." This also applies to architecture. Anna Klingmann showcased NIKE, Prada and BMW as examples of corporations which have understood precisely how a firm can create "emotional client experiences" using sensual architecture. Today, Klingmann observes a second phase of "brandism" in the development of emerging countries in the Middle East, in which architecture is being used increasingly for the "unique image of companies". Buildings are viewed as products, the worst examples hovering on the brink of meaninglessness. Yet architecture's task is to display "a city's hidden values". Unlike corporations, it must follow the creed "think local, act global". The question today is this: how can cities still retain distinguishable identities? Klingmann believes that in five years time, what will be needed are "heroes with flaws": an architecture which radiates from the inside out and takes man's need for authenticity and relevant contents seriously. "In a sleek world, luxury may come to mean sharp and rough edges." In other words: non-brands will soon become the ultimate brand.

Embedding architecture: EM2N

Zurich-based architects **EM2N, Mathias Müller + Daniel Niggli** think and act locally, with great success: their buildings are successful examples of development from the inside out. Indeed, they view architecture as an "instrument of perception"; it is precisely the undefined and unconsciously perceived which imbues architecture with meaning. Their talk "**Relational**" explained what EM2N consider to be relational architecture: "It is specific, local and global, strong yet open, intelligent and performative, and resists any clear and distinct branding." A successful example of architectural transformation is the Bahnhof Hardbrücke in Zurich (2005-2007). EM2N used SBB's clearly defined CI in an unexpectedly free manner, resulting in more open access points to the train station and a distinctive sign atop the bridge which succeeds in creating a "transferium" from the car to the train, a virtual connection space. The educational and cultural campus planned on the Toni premises in Zurich should also become a "relational" building, taking into account history and architectural circumstances and becoming accessible for the wider public.

Kerstin Höger, architect and assistant professor at the **Institute for Urban Design of ETH Zurich**, devoted her talk "**Brands Build Cities – An Urban Perspective?**" to brand hubs, which she defines as "comprehensive urban development projects which encompass entire neighbourhoods" and as "the spatialisation of brand values". Brand hubs are important in equal measure for the differentiation of corporations and the revitalisation of neighbourhoods and areas. In Germany, prime examples of brand hubs are Sony World, the Nike Clubs in Berlin or car manufacturer VW's campus in Wolfsburg. In Switzerland, the list would include the shopping centre Westside in Berne, built by Migros. Is it really a good urban strategy to build cities with and through brands? In the subsequent discussion between **Frank Joss** and **Tomaso Zanoni**, former municipal architect of Zug (2003-2008), the question gave rise to controversy. For Frank Joss, Wolfsburg is a test tube town, and he considers that Westside in Berne has failed to take into account local social circumstances. Tomaso Zanoni shares this conviction that identity can only stem from what has grown organically.

In Shanghai, the practice **Mada s.p.a.m.** proves in an impressive manner that social responsibility can be accommodated even in a country such as China. In Lucerne, **Sunny Zhanhui Chen**, architect and co-founder of Mada s.p.a.m., presented the concept of "**Parallel Practice**", which encompasses the core values of strategy, architecture, planning

and media. Mada is more than just an architectural practice, its subsidiaries SPAMAPS, SPAMART and SPAMALL turn it into an overall concept. Mada s.p.a.m. is one of the few architectural practices in China to hark back to tradition and the historically grown while at the same time encouraging a new formal vocabulary. In this context, communication plays a key role: the creative office views itself as an active cultural mediator, seeking to facilitate access to China for Western architects.

Berlin-based architect **Jürgen Mayer H.** takes entirely different questions as his starting point. His talk "**Re:Activators**" attempted to trace which shapes and influences new technologies and media could introduce into architecture. How does one integrate virtual spaces and how do these overlap with reality? These "spaces of possibility" are what interests him. One example are the office complex ADA 1's "perforated facades" (2007) in Hamburg, which derive from abstracted data storage patterns. The glass "protuberances" are accessible, they offer an outside on the inside. What does it mean to create urban space in the 21st century? This question was central to the project "Metropol Parasol" (2004-) in Sevilla. Jürgen Mayer H. found references in the immediate vicinity of the Plaza de la Encarnacion: great treetops and the roof of a cathedral inspired him to create an oversized and shading canopy for the plaza. With Metropol Parasol, a site of encounters is being created on a square with a long history: an archaeological museum is being installed underneath the plaza, the ancient tradition of the market is being revived on the pedestrian level, and restaurants and vantage points are planned on the imposing wooden roof. For Jürgen Mayer H., this building is a good example of successful public private partnership between a real estate developer and a town.

Sketched on the drawing board: Almere

In Almere, an entire city had to be newly conceived. In her talk "**Learning from Almere**", **Ria van Dijk, urban planner of Almere (NL)** presented a utopian-sounding project: a city numbering 250'000 inhabitants now stands where there was only sea 30 years ago. In a few years, says van Dijk, 400'000 will live there. Almere is a complex urban design project which, despite fast-paced growth, has obviously succeeded in keeping the balance between nature and city, public and private transportation. Ria van Dijk is well aware that successful city branding can only succeed if inhabitants' quality of life remains high: "We have sought to build high-quality architecture and create additional public space."

A successful example of this is De Citadel, a building complex signed **Christian de Portzamparc**, which was part of OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture)'s master plan, designed under the auspices of Rem Koolhaas. **André Terzibachian**, Paris-based architect at Atelier Christian de Portzamparc, headed the project for the multilevel shopping and residential premises in Almere's new town centre. "**De Citadel – the City within the City**" is of captivating complexity: a pedestrian level with shops and space to stroll stretches above a car and bus park, while atop a "flying carpet" of coloured houses stands surrounded by green grass. At an urban planning level, De Citadel is an essential element of the town centre. In future, densified building will remain a topic in Almere: to the West, a new skyline and a bridge to Amsterdam are planned, meant to connect both cities and merge them into one single region. Utopia goes even further in Almere: Ria van Dijk spoke of 15'000 floating houses and the idea to preface the mainland with artificial islands, protecting it from a raise in sea levels.

Islands are sometimes easier to handle than the mainland. What to do when one lives in a "self-complacent" city, which references architects of earlier generations without daring anything new? This is the reality faced by **Bostjan Vuga** of **Sadar Vuga Arhitekti** in Ljubljana. He is convinced that architecture can transform cities and societies even administered in "homeopathic doses". Sadar Vuga Arhitekti aim to change Ljubljana's context using "**Formula New Ljubljana**", a "DNA" of 17 formulas such as "cinematic structure" or "blown-up-windows". What might at first sound like self-restriction, when

implemented turns out to be a meaningful focus on essentials, in accordance with the town's existing substance.

Oscar Niemeyer's man-made hope for an untroubled world

Since Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, we know that architecture can make points which suddenly everyone wants to read and understand. Opening the symposium's second day, **Frank Joss** presented the Bilbao effect as symbolic of how a location could today be turned into a relic and sanctuary. Yet only few architects succeed in creating the sacred. Frank Joss recalled Oscar Niemeyer, the Brazilian architect misjudged by many – not least by Max Bill: "With Brasilia, in only 1000 days he created a city which delivers on the ambition to be a an emblem and a brand." For many people, Oscar Niemeyer set strong symbols for the future, building on emotion rather than reason. His brilliant buildings answered the question as to the nature of corporate architecture already 50 years ago. In a discussion with Frank Joss 15 years ago, Oscar Niemeyer explained how he had dealt with Bill's fundamental criticism of his buildings: "His criticism did not touch me, because my play with form has always also been a man-made hope for a world which should be as untroubled and free-spirited as my architecture in Brasilia." One is tempted to say that this hope could not be any more relevant today.

Intelligent brand architect or architectural genius?

In **Thomas Muderlak**, the symposium welcomed a branding specialist working for a premium brand. As Launch Manager and Head of International Trade Shows for **BMW Group** in Munich, he provided insights into the differentiated definitions of BMW's brand image. A clearly defined brand identity thus comprises brand design, brand communication and brand behaviour. What is the role played by architecture within this concept? For Muderlak, brand architecture is "a differentiating and recognisable expression of its values". Using the example of "pleasure" as one of the core elements of the BMW brand, with its concomitant claim "Freude am Fahren" ("Sheer Driving Pleasure"), he explained which architectural "spacescapes" have been created for BMW. In this context, BMW is faced time and again with the question of whether to work with the "intelligent brand architect", the "flexible star" or the "architectural genius". For BMW World in Munich, the company decided in favour of the latter in the guise of Coop Himmelb(l)au, and was proven right: BMW World has become a symbolic landmark. Yet what about co-branding? With BMW World, has BMW not also bought the brand Coop Himmelb(l)au? To this question asked by presenter Karin Salm, Thomas Muderlak replied in the negative.

On the other hand, **Bernhard Franken**, architect at **Franken Architekten** in Frankfurt am Main/DE, answers in the affirmative — provided it be the "architectural genius" and not the "intelligent brand architect". He knows both sides, having gained recognition in 2000 with the playful "Bubble" he created for BMW at Expo 2000 in Hanover, a visualised fusion of two water drops in glass. Franken Architekten are committed to "**Narrative Spaces**", which use well-known archetypes from the fields of theatre, film or religious liturgy. At the 2006 Geneva Motor Show, Franken Architekten worked with the staging devices of a chancel for the presentation of BMW's Z4 Coupé. Creating scenographically charged "ritualistic spaces" is a recurrent strategy of Franken Architekten. The fact that Franken Architekten are putting their architecture at the service of brands more often than they used to is no problem in Bernhard Franken's eyes, provided there remains enough leeway to lift the brand above the status of a product through unusual and creative ideas.

Site — history and geography — matters

For **Antonio Citterio**, brands also provide opportunities and possibilities as long as the planning process allows for visions. He values the dialogue with clients and can provide an example of long-standing, successful team work: Antonio Citterio has been working for Vitra for 15 years, the most recent example being Vitra's production premises in Neuenburg (CH, 2008). In his talk "**Architectural Branding as an Opportunity**", Citterio

emphasises the importance of understanding precisely the role of the client. In the case of Bulgari Hotels + Resorts in Milan (2004), for example, the point was not to insist on luxury as such, but rather to use high-end materials such as wood and stone. The question one must ask oneself is this: "Am I creating something made to measure for this specific site or do I want to see 'Citterio' writ all over?" Citterio pleads for the former and thus for more humility when it comes to self-branding.

In the ever more glaring buildings of the Gulf Region, building euphoria has led to "hallucinatory trips", architects and clients increasingly disregarding the location's specific circumstances. This is the observation made by **Zena Malek**, architect at **KAKS LLC** in Aley/Lebanon. She is one of the most influential architects of the Arab world, having made a name for herself as a critic of her homeland's faceless urbanism. In her talk "**Lindt Chocolate, Mc Donald's and Architecture...**", she criticises the abandon of humanist traditions for questionable brand projects. She terms this increase in building pace "junkism", which brings to light ever more clearly an utter lack of urban vision. "No one advocates quality of life. How is it possible for us as architects to take a stand?" One answer could be the village of Falougha near Beirut, where KAKS LLC is designing a master plan following the criteria of longevity and ecology. The "Sigra Villas" take the Lebanese building tradition as their point of departure. Zena Malek spent some time living on site in order to better understand the requirements of Falougha's inhabitants. She is convinced: in order to build good architecture, one must love people.

Fernando Menis, Menis Arquitectos, architect and urban planner from Tenerife, also seeks to reclaim "lost" sites for the population. "**Reason and Emotion**" are his focus. Menis displays a very special understanding of branding: what brands a location are its typical elements such as nature and landscape. In the case of the Canary Islands, these would be water, stone, volcanic ash and the searing sun. Recycling is also a perennial topic for Menis, who grew up poor and learned to create the new out of found objects. He thus used volcanic ash to insulate his imposing MAGMA Art & Convention Centre (2005). This is reminiscent of artistic approaches such as Italian Arte Povera.

For **Kjetil Thorsen**, architect and founding member of the renowned Oslo practice **Snøhetta**, content precedes form. Important questions thus arise for him relating to branding: is there a contradiction between the desire for one-of-a-kind representation on one hand and an architecture of story-telling and cultural development on the other? Thorsen is convinced this depends on the architect's culture, approach and ethics. He himself does not believe in the concept of genius loci: "One must react to a site instinctively, only then is it time to commission any studies." Like Bostjan Vuga and Zena Malek, he believes in the power of architecture to change society. Yet an important condition is the involvement of the local population: like Mada s.p.a.m., Snøhetta takes care to work with local craftsmen. For the new library in Alexandria (2002), Egyptian craftsmen were trained as stonemasons. And for the National Opera in Oslo (2008), a true landmark as seen both from the water and from the ground, Oslo-based boat builders manufactured the curving wooden banisters. Many Snøhetta projects implicate artists and their unconstrained viewpoint. Thorsen agrees with Zena Malek that architecture urgently needs to slow down. The return to the human rhythm is also a key aspect of the WTC Cultural Center at Ground Zero in New York, scheduled to open in 2009.

Conclusion and outlook

What the symposium has made clear is that the Garden of Eden should be a place which creates the desire to dwell in it. As to further characteristics, our speakers gave different answers. Architects, urban planners and – despite diverging viewpoints – even corporations agreed on one point: the combination of architecture and branding only makes sense if it succeeds in appealing to us at an emotional level. This applies to corporate architecture as well as publicly commissioned urban redesign. The time of iconic buildings

geared towards the one-off and short-term stimulus seems to have reached its peak. Even in highly dynamic and economically potent regions such as the Middle East, first tentative insights are beginning to flower as to the fact that architecture which does not communicate and does not take into account history, geography, culture and the human rhythm is not sustainable. Paraphrasing Zena Malek, one must love people to build good architecture. And as Anna Klingmann noted at the beginning of the symposium, architecture is like people: it has some sharp and rough edges. On this note, let's hope for architects, brand experts and corporations that their Garden of Eden remains as rough and unpolished as possible, in order to safeguard spaces of possibility.

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