Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy, Anna Klingmann, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, 364pp, ISBN: 9780262113038, hardback

In recent years, rather a lot of words have been written and spoken about designing buildings, spaces and places as part of a process of marketing. It is now widely accepted that architecture, urban design and city planning can play a significant role in creating or reinforcing a brand identity for a specific development, a district within a city or an entire city. In the main, however, there has been an accidental quality to this phenomenon. It is visible more as a *post hoc* rationalisation where it has successfully happened rather than something which has fully permeated the design process in any very conscious sense. At best the approach has been empirical and experimental rather than meaningfully based in theory. To date, at least, practitioners have not had any very firm grasp of what exactly are the key variables that manipulate the feelings of consumers about place and the manifold associations that are signified by place.

This, in essence, is the point of departure for this book. The author, Anne Klingmann, is the founder of a New York practice whose work positions architecture and design far more purposively within the processes of place, corporate and product branding. To describe this practice, she has coined (and trademarked) the label 'brandism'. Its gist is captured in her own words: '...economic value comes from emotional connection with a brand. When a brand creates an experience, it speaks to people. But what is an experience? It's the sum of all the interactions a client has with your brand. It's what makes brand environments so critical to connecting with potential customers and creating preference. ...and what could be better than architecture to achieve this? Architecture cuts through the noise, the email, the myriad of marketing messages and says: experience me'.[1] As might be expected, she is largely concerned with real estate developments, though she also shows how the same

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[1] http://www.klingmann.com/pdf/company_brochure.pdf.

principles can apply to other kinds of products, especially so firms such as BMW and Audi which have used architecture to convey their corporate brand identity.

In some ways (not that the author claims this) this book can be seen as a post-modern version of Le Corbusier's *Vers Une Architecture*, a parallel that is most explicit in Chapter 2. As in that classic text of 1920s' modernism, we are presented with images of ocean liners, air liners and motor cars. But the author highlights how today's equivalent products are designed and marketed with much more emphasis on the *experiences* of using them, rather than the actual nature of the products themselves. This observation provides the critical links to contemporary architecture and urban design. While architectural and design modernism exalted the product (in this context, the building) and, by extension, the producer (the architect), the challenge to contemporary architecture is to find meaningful dialogue and partnership with the customer. The book moves on to consider Las Vegas, Disneyland and other familiar territories of the post-modernist imagination. But the author is at pains to reject the banalities of completely commercialised architectural forms that she sees as incapable of producing places of enduring quality.

There is also criticism of the way that major cities continue to fall for the modernist fallacy (as she sees it) of wooing star architects to provide them with 'trophy buildings'. Although motivated by a desire to make cities that stand out in the global marketplace, such 'Fosterisation' (to name one leading variety) actually, in her view, produces an underlying sameness because there is no meaningful engagement of the customers (ie the users) of the places which result. Nor does the New Urbanism fare much better, criticised for its promotion of a generic vernacular locality that she views as subtly undermining the very thing it purports to protect.

It is, of course, easier to criticise what is wrong than to offer a really convincing alternative. The book ended up with arguments that the architectural profession needed to be turned inside out and there is much exhortation about the need for an experiential approach that involved the architect eschewing the role of grand choreographer to engage with the customers. Perhaps this reviewer lost the plot as the book progressed but the

author's own alternative principles on which to base a new architecture seemed little more than a series of aphorisms, combined with a personal liking for the work of some architects more than others.

Ultimately, this book is a critical exploration of some facets of contemporary architecture in its complex relationship with a western world experiencing the many threats to cultural identity that are associated with globalisation. The author offers some new insights on these issues though unfortunately does not develop these with sufficient robustness to convince the sceptical reader. The result is certainly interesting as a contribution to contemporary architectural debate but one would have to conclude that it is unlikely to change the direction of that debate in any profound way.

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References

Corbusier, Le (1923) *Vers Une Architecture*. Paris: Editions Cres, English edition trans. by Etchells, F. (1946, orig. 1927) Towards a New Architecture. London: Architectural Press.