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URBAN BLEND

Dear ...,

I would like to invite you to the opening of my exhibition URBAN BLEND at the German Architecture Center DAZ in Berlin on May 12th at 7pm. From then until June 18th, URBAN BLEND will address the importance of cultural intermixing in urban development – a relationship that will be explained in more detail below, followed by three questions to which I'd love to hear your response. In total, I hope to receive contributions from 30 colleagues, which will be shown in the ongoing process of the URBAN BLEND exhibition and subsequently documented in a publication.

Urban planning is essentially about the relationship of various individual elements to a larger whole. The relationship between building and city has been defined and evaluated differently at different times. Against this background, the cultural relevance of urban planning becomes clear – as does the necessity of constantly rethinking the relationship between architecture and urban planning.

Looking at the development of European cities, it's easy to get the impression that this relationship came apart at the seams at the beginning of the modern era. Hans Kollhoff outlined this connection in "Architektur kontra Städtebau" ("Architecture versus Urban Planning"), in which he argues that it's no longer possible to equip contemporary architecture with a self-evident urban planning *raison d'être*. Instead, there's only just architecture.

Rem Koolhaas has also addressed the topic. In "The City of the Captive Globe," he describes the peaceful coexistence of divergent European ideologies as a special feature of Manhattan and notes the complementary character of different architectures in the dense juxtaposition of that world city.

If modernity is understood in the context of globalization, the pluralism and spread of cultural diversity addressed in both texts is almost self-explanatory. A variety of different ideas did, of course, exist before the modern era, spatially and temporally separated. But it was globalization that connected different experiences, impressions, opinions, and attitudes in time and place.

What are the consequences for cities and their planning? In practice, the result is either homogenized, neighborhood-sized islands with clear boundaries or a pragmatic mix of all ideas in a confined space. Both solutions are unsustainable. Homogenized islands promote social segregation; the wild mixture is aesthetically noisy and follows the aforementioned "only just architecture" principle whereby urban spatial elements fade into the background.

URBAN BLEND is seeking a way out of this dilemma; from the perspective of the city as a whole, it demands a balanced degree of diversity and intermixing of parts.

The demand for intermixing isn't new; at the functional and social level, it is already familiar. But the problematic direction in which the long propagated principle of functional separation was leading made itself known at the latest when the large housing projects of the 1960s were completed. It became increasingly clear that quantitative density is no guarantee of urbanity. As Alison and Peter Smithson showed, urbanity depends on a specific variety that is apparent in public space. Their concept of "conglomerate ordering," which draws on traditional oriental urban structures, conveys something of the idea of openness in the sense of flexible developability – whether in the long term or temporarily through participatory influences by residents.

URBAN BLEND takes up this idea and formulates a demand not for just functional and social mixing, but cultural mixing as well. That means defining the heart of the urban as the aesthetic articulation of the dense juxtaposition of incompatible goals. It's about the image of participation within individualized and globalized societies. It's an approach that's simultaneously idealistic and pragmatic.

We seem to be drawing closer and closer to the old Asian worldview in which humankind does not exist dialectically in relation to Nature, but rather sees itself as part of the larger natural system. When we talk today in Europe about the urban landscape and conceive of the city as a kind of second Nature, we are increasingly following the Asian understanding in which the city and all of its elements are a self-evident part of a larger combination and have been for thousands of years. In unplanned, organic urban planning, the relevance of the fourth dimension finds expression. The open additive structures of conglomerate ordering mediate naturally between the always and never complete condition of the city. Herein unfolds a great strength in contrast to the rigid guiding principles of the rediscovered European city.

Globalization provides us the opportunity to learn from each other. By now, short circuits and intersecting identities have developed between different cultures and grown increasingly important. The expansion of these connecting forces holds greater potential for the city than concentrating on the congealed European heritage.

URBAN BLEND seeks to expand the urban development spectrum and generate new urbanisms from all relevant architectural approaches.

Three questions:

How can the diversity of the globalized world be organized into the unity of the city?

Do we need new models for that, or are models fundamentally problematic?

What does the principle of cultural mixing mean in the context of URBAN BLEND?

I kindly request a response of up to two pages – on your own stationery, please, and by the end of May. That way, the content can be incorporated into two discussions at the DAZ Y-Table scheduled for June 1st and 15th, both at 7pm. You are warmly invited to both events.

Thank you and kind regards,

