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The in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaborations in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

FROM HOMI K. BHABHA, *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE*

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ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS, DESIGN AND CULTURE / ALLISON WILLIAMS, *San Francisco, California*

Public buildings are a bridge between culture and technology, environment and genuine experience. They set the stage for our memories and manipulate our emotions. They can—and should—engage us as individuals in a personal exploration of ourselves, framed within the unique perspectives of our lives, heritages and cultures. Buildings make us proud and communicate a profound sense of hope and a commitment to the future.

Our recent generation of buildings, those on the boards and under construction, are the new hosts for such memories. They will generate timeless reflections for those who pass through them, capturing consciences and becoming the places where individual intimacy and relevance can be found, and found again, ever differently and uniquely. Our buildings are increasingly a response to specific places, climates, cultures and Culture. They set the stage for a rich, open-ended dialogue with their context and within their context. These intelligent interfaces are a definitive part of a successful global practice and as we engage a broader audience, so do we engage diverse populations and distinct climates.

Culture—whether resident, ethnic, geographical, communal or otherwise—has a fundamental influence on design. It is an essential layer of information in our shared dialogue and forms the foundation of our work in cities around the world. It is central to a civil society and a profound organizing system. We engage culture in support of commerce, as a source of enlightenment, as a form of entertainment and as the platform for tradition. Culture, as expressed in architecture, is a building’s ability to enable, contain and support the necessities of life and the traditions of our lives. As architects, our quest for a responsive authenticity in our work means that we are committed to the integration of a culturally-relevant language and a responsible, ecological response. We tap the resources of science, economics and history to educate ourselves about what matters environmentally, culturally and otherwise. As we peel back the layers of experience and the past, almost forensically, to expose what makes a place, a people or a circumstance

distinct, we are tasked with distilling what matters and positioning our designs metaphorically, spatially and abstractly. In de-objectifying a specific object or reference, we evolve a set of principles: a rationale and a language are developed through the strategic materiality of surface, the manipulation of daylight, the creation of nuance or even an intentional ambiguity. These strategies can be potent stimulus to memory. When architecture is transformed into tangible, emotional space it resonates abstractly, yet with relevance, with the customs and beliefs, the context, the craft of construction and the culture of a place.

THE AUGUST WILSON CENTER IN PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA is a 65,000 square foot, first-voice, ethnically-specific institution founded to celebrate the accomplishments of a minority population living within, cross-fertilizing and informing a predominate culture. The Center is an intersection of culture and circumstance that celebrates the unique contributions of Black Americans in a Steel Belt city known for its ethnic, immigrant population where Italians, Portuguese, Germans and Blacks convened and worked alongside one another. The building honors African-American culture and its significant contribution to the innovation and prosperity of the region in the postwar era as well as the dominance of “black” within a broader American culture.

It is not a museum.

The Center takes a green stand in keeping with Pittsburgh's leadership in environmental sustainability. The 2-story building is structured to accept a 100-foot tall tower to house a hotel, condominiums or additional exhibition space in the future, maximizing the potential of the triangular site gifted by the redevelopment agency. Notably, the Heinz Foundation was an early donor, granting

four million dollars for design fees contingent upon the Center achieving LEED® certification. The building's primary façade on Liberty Avenue, with 328-foot frontage, strategically faces north and is predominately glass.

The choice of site made a statement about the Center: prominent, accessible and transparent, it says much about the institution's sense of its own future. The choice of this site over one in the traditional epicenter of the black community in Pittsburgh's Hill District, home to the rich traditions of music, art and theater among local African Americans, was a profound statement of confidence, commanding its new place in the context of the larger city.

The risk of identifying is objectifying: the Center identifies, contemplates, abstracts and composes elements of iconic importance to the African-American community.

THE DHOW - the sailing ships that carried African culture from the continent and into the Diaspora; sails full of wind, proud, moving, leading.

THE WALL OF STONE - solid, heavy and symbolic of a culture's connection to its land and the land as central to the experience of place.

THE MASON JAR - simple and familiar, yet ever changing, as its contents transform and renew.

THE STREET AND THE SIDEWALK - and by extension the lobby - references the importance of the street in black culture and, specifically, the way of life on Wiley Street in the Hill District neighborhood, where impromptu jazz, performance and art was staged.

THE DRUM - in tribal reference it is the theater at the center of everything, the heart of music, art, performance, a spiritual communication.

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CALEXICO, CALIFORNIA AND MEXICALI, MEXICO, define a border culture at the threshold, a third place familiar to cities along the border, where cultures and economies become indelibly coupled and yet severed by politics and a magic “line in the sand.”

Historically, the border has been viewed as a definitive line between two countries. This line has separated cultures, economies and sometimes, even quality of life. However, various sociopolitical changes have recently allowed, or caused, these same borders to become an abstract of themselves—something more porous and, ultimately, more productive and supportive of their unique, in-between quality of place. This middle ground or “third country” is typically comprised of paired cities existing on either side of a border. The two cities share a unique, dependent and symbiotic relationship with their successes and prosperity intertwined. In fact, it is this co-dependence that motivates the GSA to maintain the port immediately adjacent to the border at this major urban intersection.

The border crossing between Calexico, California, (population ~40,000) and Mexicali, Mexico, (population ~1M) convene at the mouth of the Imperial Valley where the two economies are dependent upon one another for water, work and commerce. The labor pool moves back and forth across this border at the highest rate of any contiguous border with the United States.

At the moment of that crossing, and to some distance to either side, is a post-border precinct that represents the culture of each country. The port itself, by extension, is a civic place that allows for safe, efficient and dignified passage, extracting the essence of both cultures and representing the gateway to both places.

Habitation of this transient middle ground is characterized by a preponderance of traffic: an automobile culture of people, most whose feet never touch the ground, but also the pedestrians who cross every day to work, shop, eat and school their children, the many binationals who come and go, and come and go.

The cities share the remnants of an orthogonal street grid connecting view corridors between the two cities. The site itself is the residue of the New River’s path, the Southern Pacific rail tracks that cut across it, 16 lanes of traffic and a 30-foot drop in topography from east to west. The site’s buildable area is, finally, a sliver that straddles the tracks, compressed between the border and the commercial heart of the city.

The challenge at Calexico is to define a legible idea, despite the fragmentation which exists at every level. How might co-dependence, division and lack of a predominant architecture lead to a concept that focuses on the individual experiences of crossing the border, weaving the separate, yet intertwined, cultures and urban fabrics of the two sister cities into a whole place?

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THE PRINCESS NORA BINT ABDULRAHMAN UNIVERSITY (PNU), RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, is a study in the environmental and cultural response to climate and religious tradition centered on the concept of privacy and opportunity for modern Islamic women. PNU is a new university campus for 40,000 full-time and undergraduate women. At 30 million square feet of space, situated on 2,000 acres of land, it is the largest facility of its kind in the world. Within a master plan developed around traditional ceremonial entry sequences and monumentally-scaled open space, several of our offices were tasked with bringing modern authenticity, hierarchy of scale and sequence and functional flexibility to the development of a state-of-the-art complex in support of academic, health science and research, hospital care and sports and recreation. Most of the campus classroom spaces (in the Academic Colleges and Health Sciences) are restricted to women. Outside of these areas women remain veiled in observance of the conservative traditions of Islam.

These traditions have had great influence on Islamic architecture, where women's privacy has long been preserved through the lattice screens (mashrabiyyah) that protected the minimal openings in the masonry walls behind which women moved in parallel, private quarters, limiting the exposure and visibility of their bodies to the public gaze.

The design challenge was to create a sustainable, modern place while still abiding by traditional cultural and religious norms. The resultant response creates an analogy between the concept of the building screen and the women's veil, the symbolic, visible indication of the transition from childhood to womanhood. It explores a nuanced understanding of the idea of transparency, pattern and sequence in an edited palette of local materials and efficient construction techniques. The event of young female students crossing a clear threshold between public and private space establishes the campus as a place not only for

clear threshold between public and private space establishes the campus as a place not only for learning, but also for unveiling new horizons and experiences, beliefs and opinions for modern Islamic young women. Once inside, these women experience a rare, total privacy paired with the freedom to explore their spiritually, identity and individuality unencumbered. The women can literally and figuratively shed their traditional garb in order to engage in their own professional success and personal discovery.

Linking climate and culture, the analogy also highlights the conceptual link between shading the building and veiling the body in protection against the desert sun: the preciousness of women and the delight of shade, the tension between interior and exterior, concealment and revelation. The exterior screens and perforated walls provide shade while allowing the envelope behind them to be open to views and freely glazed in a modern vocabulary and building tectonic.

CREATE, *The Campus For Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise*, in Singapore, is a microcosm of an island culture and the product of modern, science-based politics.

As part of an accelerating national thrust towards an inventive, innovative and entrepreneurial economy on the island of Singapore, CREATE is an 800,000 square foot, uber-sustainable center for scientific research in the rain forest designed to respond to the traditions and culture of urban life on the equator. Slated to reach the platinum level within Singapore's sustainability system, it is intended to surpass current flexibility and performance benchmarks for scientific research facilities in the tropics and will pioneer the use of advanced environmental sustainability and energy-efficient technologies.

CREATE is a historic opportunity to synthesize the artistic, scientific and ecological communities of Greater Singapore as a microcosm of Singapore's burgeoning intellectual talent and resources. In response to the Country's culturally-rooted belief that the human soul needs nature's vitality to lift its spirit, the design celebrates the rain and restores the gardens. Recognizing our inherent biological need for environmental quality and natural beauty, the landscape plays a key role in the creation and centering of place at CREATE. It is the conduit between the building and program, weaving together topography, vegetation and water resources. The surrounding natural environment and its ecological rhythms remind those inside the lab of nature's delicate resource balance and the qualities through which great innovation takes shape, inspiring collaboration among the world-class talents the center will attract.

Adaptability and daylight are the fundamental ordering devices at CREATE. These simple concepts rigorously influence the overall land use, site plan, building section and plan of the east lab buildings and the tower, challenging the traditional internal, double-loaded corridor organization of research buildings. The key transformative strategy at CREATE is to remove circulation from the normal center location of the plan and shift it to the exterior of the building. Through these glazed circulation corridors, daylight penetrates the interior spaces at a depth of approximately eight meters from each side, resulting in a fully day-lit floor plate, significantly reducing the need for artificial lighting and greatly reducing energy requirements.

When it is completed in 2011, CREATE will be a vibrant and dense urban organism in which environmental, artistic and scientific discovery will meet in a union of opposites—a tower in the garden, science in the jungle.

As a global magnet for scientific research, a cultural brew of intelligence, CREATE harnesses brain power, attracts flora and fauna, conducts solar energy and social energy, captures wind power, celebrates rainfall, manages and restores the landscape...and gently breathes.

We strive to create a timeless architecture: at once an expression of the technology through which it is crafted, a respectful exploitation of the opportunities presented by unique sites and climates and a statement about the traditions of the cultures whose values it recognizes and serves. Whether in celebration of an ethnically-specific culture, in exploration of the phenomenon of overlapping lifestyles at the circumstance of a political border or in the delicate intertwining of religion, climate or gender-based customs and traditions, we trust these buildings will resonate within their unique place and purpose and yet, find relevance and meaning beyond themselves and ourselves.



Climate is clearly one of the prime factors in culture and therefore the built form. It is the main spring for all the sensual qualities that add up to a vital tropical architecture.

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