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CONNECTIVE TISSUE

Certain places are distinctive because of the scale of the buildings that give them their character, others for the many disparate qualities that come together to make them memorable. There are elements of the urban landscape as well, that deserve protection and preservation at the very least, if not replication and propagation. The EDRA/*Places* awards program brought together a group of practitioners and academicians from many places and many points of view to review 120 entries, and to help identify some of these traits – they came united by the focus of the EDRA/*Places* awards, which was to determine what makes good places.

Award programs and competitions can inform place-making before, during and after a design has reached completion. They can be vehicles through which provocative buildable or unbuildable ideas are entertained; they can be instrumental, and are sometimes required protocols, for the building of public projects; and they can present formal adjudicating settings through which significant built work is distinguished. The EDRA/*Places* awards program presents a unique genre that doesn't easily fit into these categories because its form inspires a unique culture of criticism among its jury members, who were charged with two equally important tasks: identifying excellent research, which informs the making of places, and excellent design, which addresses existing places. The fact that all the entries were reviewed by the same jury inspired a whole other level of inquiry. What kind of research led to this design project? What kind of design might this research lead to? How can we conceive of one without the other?

Speculating on our own criteria, the very basis for the guiding rules that help us to measure better, was an outcome of countless discussions about the nature of the submission material and even about the veracity of the submissions. Inevitable questions lurked about – can we trust everything we have been asked to review? How can anyone responsibly judge existing places? Shouldn't we fly across the globe to test out every entry, to live out every research methodology? After judgment was made, we wished to present the winning entries in a manner that addressed these questions, and in a way that surpassed the assembly-line approach, the usual receiving, stamping, inspecting and publishing conduit. After all, the debate that was inspired by an overwhelming number of strong submissions, and which could never be accurately transcribed, was in many ways, the highlight of the jurying event, that is, the ruminating and the pondering.

The method undertaken in this publication was to bring multiple viewpoints together, a combination of the material we received, key statements made by the jurors and invited observations by people that know the projects and research we awarded first-hand. After all, the juror's choices can only represent the outcome of a particular intersection of personalities, projects and time; and if we are truly interested in locating that which makes good places tick, why would we end with the jurying process? Can we conceive of an awards program that adjudicates not simply to hand out accolades and glamour shots, but to raise and sustain new debates?

We also believe that it is important to share some of the lessons learned by the jurors, who filled the air with pithy statements about design, research and pedagogy. Again, the motive here is to formulate a way of understanding the practices that surround competitions, and to lay the framework for the forthcoming award program. Do we define and translate criteria in a similar manner? Are we on the same page? Momentarily coming together

and comparing our conceptions about excellent place-making was certainly appreciated by all the participants. And the goal of reaching consensus served the discussions when we encountered the challenges of jurying submissions that had already been published, or the work of colleagues. This is certainly the case within the small world of the allied disciplines at hand. It made sense, then, that we publish some of the projects that received at-large accolades, but that had some element of conflict of interest through the participation or close involvement of a jury member — what we perceived to be an unfortunate coincidence of time and place. In the Place Portfolio, we find two such projects and another that we considered to be particularly instructive.

We assumed that to serve the shared interest of the work represented and to best serve the interests of design and research, it would be critical to communicate in some meaningful way what exactly that shared interest is. We would not go so far as to suggest that art or architecture, or dance, for that matter, are the only tools for building a workable ecology or a sense of community in today's modern, television age. But the pursuit of a healthy environment and a community simply cannot be followed without meaningful architecture that elevates the human spirit, without town squares that honor the collective good, or even celebratory rituals when the occasion calls for them. And our ability to represent these shared interests fairly and equally to all is a test in itself. We would suggest that the connective tissue that has the potential to tie us together lies in the realm of articulation, in advancement as it is understood in the most diverse terms, and in the realm of communicating a common concern. That connective tissue is design, and the inquisitive and patient steps that lead to it.

Just how are designers of places going to communicate their aspirations better? To find out how is to reveal a common good. And to reveal the common good — our civic realm, our preserved and vital ecology — is once again to distinguish between truth and self deception, special interests and common concerns, and power and poetry. Design does have the power to articulate for our world that it is not power but poetry that reminds us of the richness and diversity of our existence. And the steps that lead to it, which fuel and sustain the creation of that power, also advance our shared interests in the most profound ways imaginable.