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Designers and Social Responsibility

Good places exist within and respond to many contexts. The following essays suggest new ways in which designers can construct a sense of responsibility to the communities, people and environments that are the context of their work. The essays are excerpted from presentations given last March at a symposium called “Social Responsibility and the Design Professions” — a day-long discourse about the social, economic, ecological and institutional implications of environmental design.

The symposium, sponsored by Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility/New York, was held at the New School for Social Research and organized by Susana Torre, chair of the environmental design department at Parsons School of Design.

Photos by Todd W. Bressi and André Schütz.

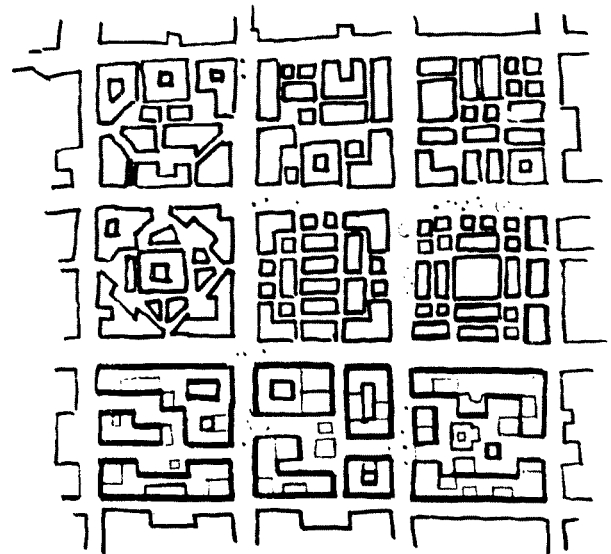
Responsibility and Responsiveness

Richard Sennett

When I was asked to address the question of the social responsibility of architects, I thought it would be interesting to pursue the question of the social responsibility of architectural forms. It also occurred to me that one could ask in what way architectural forms can be socially responsive, which is different from being

socially responsible. I want to explore those two notions by describing the work of the Indian architect Balkrishna Doshi, which seems to me to be both socially responsive and responsible.

Doshi has been working for many years on the rebuilding of Jaipur. The work is an attempt to incorporate a notion that is generic to Jaipuri architecture — that the form of every house represents the cosmology of the universe as it was conceived in the ninth century, that every house is an extension of that rigidly geometric world. Doshi has tried to build housing that is massive in scale, up to a thousand units at a time, and that can be put up in accordance with these old cosmological principles.



Sketch of Vidyadhar Nagar,
from *Balkrishna Doshi: An
Architecture for India*,
William J. Curtis, ed.

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