

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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Doshi has made his architecture responsive by designing a set of building units that can be put together easily by the people who are going to live in them, allowing people without much money to build their own houses. The housing is responsive to a set of social and economic conditions and uses

**To be socially responsible is to believe, whether people like it or not, in a social vision that brings people together. It means talking not about issues of representation and popularity, but about what a social space ought to look like.**

— *Richard Sennett*

the very act of constructing one's own environment as a way of bettering people's condition.

Doshi's architecture is responsible in a different sense. It is more than an attempt to understand what the act of participation in building will mean by realizing the sociological relationship between a material and its user. It is an attempt to make a system of building that expresses in its forms not so much the lives of the people who are putting it up and living it, but the ancient religion of those people. The architecture accomplishes this (that is, it involves people in build-

ing a kind of religious shrine that they don't understand before they build it) by incorporating the notion that the act of building can create unfinished or partial objects.

I am not suggesting that we build cosmological cities on the model of medieval Jaipur. Doshi's notion is that even though

there is an established concept of form, there can still be an architecture that is socially responsive, that inducts people into the world. Rather than make completed structures, people are given materials to make unfinished forms, perhaps forms that can never be finishable, like the tenets of that religion.

This example is suggestive of how we can think about what makes a form responsive in our own culture: It should embody some way of inducting people into a reality that is different than the reality in which they began.

A responsive architecture breaks with the

approach of creating forms that realize a specific program or function, no matter who is participating in determining that function. A responsive form must respond to our need for transformation by allowing us to create unfinished or unfinishable objects.

An unresponsive approach results in objects that — although they may be made in a socially responsive way because everybody's participated — do not transform the lives of the people that dwell in them. These forms, by being complete, do not admit of displacement or the kind of rituals of use that grow up.

Think of how inelastic many of the forms we create today are compared to the building blocks of eighteenth-century Georgian architecture, which is enormously responsive in the sense that the forms themselves can be displaced. Think of how difficult it would be to transform a skyscraper that is meant for commercial use into residential use.

The aesthetic problem confronting urbanists is how to create underdetermined objects. What I consider socially responsive architecture is conceiving of objects that are incomplete or even incompletable, that can be added to or rearranged, and of how we can use the advances in building technology that have occurred in the last hundred years for the purpose of making less definite objects.

## Finding Spaces and Filling Them

*Janet Lippman  
Abu-Lughod*

Effective, socially responsible action takes more than good will and motivation. It takes open spaces in the urban fabric, an open process to fill in those spaces and good timing.

By "open space" I mean something more than public space. There is physical space, which is what architects and planners usually work with, and there is social space, which is what sociologists like me usually work with.

One can think of open space as emptiness or as opportunities. One can look at burned-out areas of our cities as abandoned or as potentially fillable. One can look at empty nests as lonely or free.

I have been working on a project that focuses on New York City's East Village, a neighborhood to the east of Greenwich Village, where the destruction of the physical area and its social fabric has resulted in a large amount of open physical and social space. Arson, abandon-

ment and demolition have opened up an enormous number of empty lots, or physical space, particularly in an area that I call the "DMZ," or Demilitarized Zone, which insulates the inhabited East Village from the inhabited public housing projects along the East River. Other physical open spaces include Tompkins Square Park, which was known, until recently, for the cultural diversity and tolerance it sustained. The solid phalanx of public housing projects running along the River has considerable open and unused space between buildings.

The social space in the East Village includes the homeless; single-parent families, most of them headed by poor women; and many people marginal

to mainstream processes of production and consumption — squatters, who are outside the housing market; artists and musicians who are outside the art and music market; and people who are remnants of Loïsaida, a primarily Puerto Rican and Latino community now gutted and emptied out. These conditions can be seen as problems or as openings that invite new forms of socially responsible planning and architecture and new forms of social organization that could spring from self-help activities and an open agenda.

Many opportunities have already been lost. Within the DMZ, for example, un-imaginative, cinderblock public housing projects have been put up recently, almost overnight.

They could have been self-help housing had they involved the people who would live there in the construction. Instead, these projects are already deteriorating. There are no mixed land uses — no space for commerce, for production, or for diverse types of consumption.

Another lost opportunity concerns the city's plans to sell vacant land for market-rate housing and to use the profits to subsidize the rehabilitation of abandoned buildings for below market-rate housing. This is where timing comes in. When the New York real estate market collapsed, there was a "default" opportunity to rebuild the East Village for the people already there — people living as squatters in these otherwise abandoned

buildings, families who are doubled and tripled up in Housing Authority apartments in a desperate effort to avoid homelessness and renters clinging to substandard apartments because they have no affordable alternative

The opportunity to integrate the homeless, the poor and the squatters into the construction and rehabilitation efforts has been lost. Tompkins Square Park has a small but viable squatter population; at its peak two winters ago the resident population included 300 people living in self-built shacks. Any chance of mobilizing some of this labor has been foregone. (Last summer, the Tompkins Square Park squatters were forcibly evicted; more than 300 police were deployed to



Scenes from the East Village "DMZ": Top: A settlement of homeless people. Bottom: New public housing.

close the park and control entrance selectively, only to small areas. The homeless moved to another site in the DMZ.)

There is one last, tragic example. Many New York bridges are falling down and one of the reasons seems to be that homeless people have removed the wooden beams that support these bridges. The homeless burn the beams to keep warm in the winter. I would urge all of us to consider these empty spaces — the spaces where the beams are as well as the spaces where the homeless and the squatters are — and how to use these spaces to rebuild the city.

One of the most promising places where space is opening up is in the architecture and planning professions. Construction is down and so is the demand for architects and planners. Perhaps the most immediate thing we can do is turn this space (the time that architecture and planning professionals have) to constructive use by recognizing that there is a large group of socially marginal people who are the clients with whom socially responsible architects and planners should be working.

Our image of the advanced urban economy is probably best described by icons of the corporate city — office skyscrapers, suburban corporate campuses, hotel/conference centers — most of which are sealed off from their surroundings. This image has even invaded residential areas in the form of luxury high-rise apartment buildings.

There are parts of this economy that are hidden by these icons yet connected to them in ways that are not well understood. One connection that is not evident involves activities like manufacturing and industrial and personal services, which we think of as belonging to another era or type of system; they are in fact part of the advanced urban economy.

## Revealing Connections in the Corporate Economy

*Saskia Sassen*

**I have given up hope of finding 'the community will'; that is why I am no longer a person of the '60s. I have given up hope of being a philosopher king, which is why I am an ex-city planner. Now I am content to try and nurture open-ended agendas, political conflict, small resolutions and enough open space for a diversity of members of the community to find solutions.**

— *Janet Lippman Abu-Lughod*

