



# PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD

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This last spring I had the opportunity to be a part of the Nano City Super Studio. Like most architectural studios that one takes, this one too overturned our initial assumptions and we were quickly immersed in the challenge of learning and designing concurrently. The studio began when we arrived in Delhi, India on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Despite the week-early start of the semester we were all eager to meet Sabeer Bhatia (our client) and begin this new adventure. That first day, and many others that followed, were filled with a whirlwind of experiences—most of which were facilitated by a bright red Volvo tourist bus. In a week we visited Delhi, Chandigarh, and our site in an effort to gain some knowledge for the studio. Yet, like most short stays our trip was limited by the time it took to travel between sites, leaving us little time to experience India on our own.

The rest of the semester was spent achieving a balance between our client's aspirations and our design ideas. As designers we had numerous debates about our competing visions for Nano City. Having an actual client for the proj-

ect also put most of us for the first time in a position of negotiation between our client's desires, our own professional responsibilities, the needs of the population who currently live on site, and those who will eventually become residents of Nano City. This tension between the professionally defined "client" and the social responsibilities of design was further enhanced by the inherent complexities of an international studio. No matter how sensitive we tried to be to the Indian context and the site, we were always functioning from Wurster Hall in Berkeley, California and like our experience of India through the windows of a red Volvo bus, we were constantly aware of our own limitations of our experience as Americans.

Yet there is also something universal about our experience as outsiders that represents the conflicts

and challenges we all face as designers. Whether we are designing a city in Haryana, India or California, USA we are to some degree always removed from our clientele and we must resist the compulsion to objectify those whom we design for through the actions that we take. While the experience of designing in a foreign context helps us hone our professional skills, it also makes us more aware of our limitations, thereby challenging us to work outside normative design techniques and think critically about the appropriateness of every move. In the end I believe that this experience made my peers and myself better at dealing with issues of professional responsibility in this new world of transnational place-making. Indeed, design is the tool through which we may engage the "other" even as we discover ourselves. <sup>FW</sup>

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