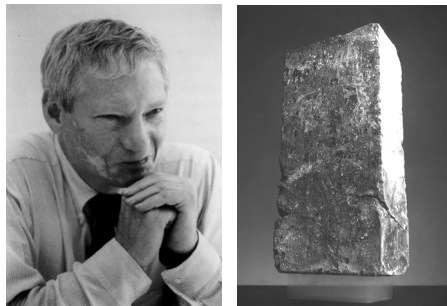


Encountering Materials in Architectural Production

The case of Kahn and brick at IIM



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AUSTRALIA**

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Thesis Abstract

Encountering Materials in Architectural Production

The case of Kahn and brick at IIM

The architectural discourse on materials frequently engages the legendary dialogue between architect Louis Kahn and the brick that wanted to be an arch to alert us to the role played by materials in the process of architectural production. However, over the four decades in which this anecdote has come to rule the collective memory of our profession very little has been done to examine the actual circumstances behind such an encounter. It is the contention of this thesis that the disregard for historical conditions surrounding this event stems from a historiographical tradition that employs the subject-object dichotomy to negate the very possibility of such an event, forcing the dialogue to be regarded as just a metaphor for the mentality of the architect. In order to question the monopoly of such a theoretical stance, which inadvertently limits the understanding of the role played by materials in the process, the thesis posits the dialogue between Kahn and brick as a subject of historical inquiry outside the confines of this subject-object paradigm – deconstructed in the recent works of Bruno Latour as the “Modern Paradox.” By historically reconstructing the event of this dialogue, the thesis exposes the neglected realm of action where the encounter between the architect and the material takes place, and thereby helps to reveal a new and more complex picture of the process of architectural production.

At the outset the thesis conducts a thematic survey of twentieth century architectural theory exposing an epistemological bias in the approach to architectural materials. It then employs the philosophical works of Martin Heidegger on the nature of “things” and the current sociological debate on the shift from actors to “actants” in the works of Bruno Latour to construct a framework where the architectural experience of an active and symmetric exchange with materials can be argued. Theoretically, then, the thesis invokes arguments for a “social life of things” to situate the discourse of materials in architecture within a larger framework of the social, and thereby offers an alternate way of both understanding and representing materials in architectural practice.

As an interpretive historical study, the second part of the thesis then employs its adopted theoretical framework to situate new historical information regarding both Louis Kahn (as an architect) and brick (as an architectural material in India) during the critical decade of the 1960s. Using the historiographical method of a micronarrative, it focuses its gaze on the design and construction of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) campus in Ahmedabad, the site of the fabled encounter, and incorporates the narrative of the material actant (brick) in parallel to the narrative of the human actant (Kahn). The alternative account of the architectural production of the IIM that emerges offers a much more detailed picture of the historical conditions and conjunctions that might explain one of the most influential anecdotes in the architectural discourse of the past century. Through this case study the thesis generates an enriched understanding of the encounter between architects and materials, wherein materials may be recognized beyond just their physical properties as active contributors to the process of architectural production.

Thesis Declaration

Name: **AMIT SRIVASTAVA**

Program : **Ph.D. IN ARCHITECTURE**

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